

ASHDOWN FOREST

GARTH CHRISTIAN



Garth Christian came to Sussex exactly twenty years ago to convalesce after a serious illness. The enforced inactivity gave him the opportunity to develop his early interest in journalism which he channelled into writing about his deep knowledge of the countryside. The lucid and commanding way in which he presents the problems associated with the ever increasing pressures of industry and leisure on the countryside is probably unrivalled. The influences of his early life in the mining country of Derbyshire emerge as the sense of personal involvement that is so evident in his writing. His books, his regular features in *Country Life* and his articles in the national press have made a unique contribution towards public acceptance of conservation as an integral and essential component of modern life.

Above all else Garth Christian is convinced that the key to the future lies in the rising generation. By his efforts he has produced in his home village of Chailey almost a whole generation of 'environment conscious' children, by involving them in the work of the Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve. Among his many commitments he serves on the Council of the Sussex Naturalists Trust and travels extensively up and down Britain and is a familiar figure at national conferences on the countryside.

It is not possible either to understand the present or prescribe for the future without an appreciation and knowledge of the past. That Garth Christian believes this is nowhere better exemplified than in the present book, as the meticulous care with which he has carried out his researches bears witness.

D.T.S.



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ASHDOWN FOREST

GARTH CHRISTIAN

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As Chairman of the Society of The Friends of Ashdown Forest I would like to thank Mr. Garth Christian for writing this book for us. He has in his own inimitable way brought the past to life and it is right for us to remember that it is due to the sturdy independence of the Commoners that there is the unenclosed Forest for us to enjoy today.

I would also like to thank the Marquis of Aberdeen and Mr. Derek Evatt who have been Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary respectively for the Society since its inception.

We are indebted to Mr. Scowen and Mr. Murray for some of the photographs.

R. J. LUMSDEN

Forest Row

May, 1967

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THIS book owes much to many people. I am particularly indebted to Mr. P. Williams, Clerk to the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, and to his assistant who not only allowed me to examine the Board's early records, but who kindly lent me "Mr. Marsh's File" containing transcripts of documents in the Public Record Office, London. I owe much to the scientific writings of Mr. David Streeter, and to the generosity of Mr. O. C. Jenks, a member of the Sussex Naturalists' Trust, who placed at my disposal his thesis on "The Rise and Fall of Woodland in Ashdown Forest". Anyone who writes about this area is bound to make much use of *The Victoria County History of Sussex*, Volume II, the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, the work of Mr. I. D. Margary and W. H. Hills; and the papers of the late Ernest Straker, which are lodged at Barbican House, Lewes. I am grateful for much valuable aid from librarians of the East Sussex County Library at Lewes and East Grinstead, the East Sussex Record Office at Pelham House, Lewes, and from Dr. L. F. Salzman, Librarian, and Mr. K. W. Dickins, Curator of Deeds, of the Sussex Archaeological Society. A special debt is owed to Mr. I. D. Margary, F.S.A., and Mr. F. Bentham Stevens, F.S.A., who kindly read the manuscript, though responsibility for any errors is entirely mine. Above all, my thanks are due to the Chairman, Honorary Secretary and Committee of the Friends of Ashdown Forest for their patience. A bibliography may be consulted on application to the author.

GARTH CHRISTIAN

Beggars' Wood,
Chailey,
Sussex.

*Mr. Garth Christian died suddenly on the 26th November,
1967, to the great regret of all his friends. His memory
will survive in this Book.*

I

INTRODUCTION

THE Weald of Sussex has been called “the place where London ends and England can begin”, and there is no question that Ashdown Forest, an integral part of the Weald, forms the finest stretch of open heathland within seventy miles of the capital. Here it is still possible to enjoy solitude without queueing for it, to walk or ride for half a day and seldom meet another person, to drive along roads bordering private woodland where 200 fallow deer dwell, and to explore on foot ten square miles of dry, damp and wet heathland—6,400 acres—harbouring distinctive plant and animal communities that are an endless source of wonder and delight to the keen observer, whether he is a professional scientist, an amateur naturalist or a casual walker.

For the increasing hosts of visitors who picnic on the edge of the heath, the almost bare, wind-swept slopes of the forest offer splendid views far across the well-wooded Weald to the South Downs which, from this distance, almost justify Gilbert White’s description of them as a “vast range of mountains”. In late summer, colonies of bog asphodel infuse the sphagnum bogs with a golden glow and wisps of white cotton grass bend before the winds. The rare marsh gentians flourish on a few stretches of damp heath, though their numbers tend to fluctuate for reasons not yet explained. On warm summer nights when moths are abundant, the weird churring and wing-clapping of nightjars may be heard amid the bracken and gorse. Occasionally, the odd pair of hobbies nesting in some scattered clump of Scots pines may be seen pouncing upon the grasshoppers and dragonflies; and the evocative calls of nesting curlew are sometimes heard amid the bleached purple moor grass and heather where blackcock bred until a century ago.

Ashdown Forest, however, can never be fully appreciated if it is regarded only as a pleasant landscape that is a source of spiritual and physical renewal for visitors from the towns. It also forms the home of a population that includes more than a thousand Commoners, though fewer than fifty of them now exercise their ancient rights to cut bracken, heather and grass, to graze cattle and pigs, or to claim birch, willow and alder for fuel and repairs on their own holdings.

All common land has an owner who may be an individual, a corporation or a statutory body such as a local authority. The owner normally enjoys the ordinary

rights of the property-holder, limited only by the statutory prohibitions against enclosure and by the rights of the Commoners to the natural produce of the ground. Ashdown Forest—Aesca's hill forest—forming part of the Manor of Duddleswell, was granted by King Edward III to his third son John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in 1372, and it remained for three centuries among the vast possessions of the Duchy of Lancaster. After the Restoration it was disafforested by letters patent of Charles II and granted, in 1671, to the Earl of Bristol and then to the Earl of Dorset and others whose efforts to inclose and develop the wild heathland were perpetually frustrated "by the crossness of the neighbourhood". Under the Settlement made in 1693, by decree of the Duchy Court, following a lawsuit involving Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset, against John Newnham and other Commoners, 6,400 acres in the vicinity of the farms and villages were declared subject to rights of common, and authority was granted for the rest of the 13,991 acres to be inclosed. Successive Dukes of Dorset, as Lords of the Manor of Duddleswell, remained owners of the soil until, with the extinction of the male line in 1815, it passed to their successor in title by marriage, Earl De La Warr. The present Lord of the Manor of Duddleswell is Lord Buckhurst, eldest son of Earl De La Warr.

Ashdown Forest differs from other common land in being administered by a Board of Conservators deriving their authority from successive Parliamentary Acts of 1885 and 1937. Under the Ashdown Forest Act, 1937, the modest income that the Conservators derive from the Forest rates levied on those with common rights is supplemented by an annual grant from the East Sussex County Council, the East Grinstead Urban District Council and the Rural District Councils of Uckfield and Cuckfield, and these local authorities, like the Lord of the Manor and the Commoners, are represented on the Board of Conservators. Almost the whole of the forest has now been scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, which means that the Nature Conservancy must be consulted before any change of land use is authorised.

These administrative arrangements, with their elaborate safeguards to ensure that the owner of the soil, the Commoners and the local authorities all have a voice in the management of the area, and that the high scientific value of the heathland is not overlooked, might have surprised our forebears. In his *Description of the County of Sussex*, published in Paternoster Row, London, in 1813, "Mr. Shoberl", to quote the description of the author on the title page, condemned this "black mountainous country" in no uncertain terms. Taking his views, and almost his very words, from the Rev. Arthur Young, agricultural reformer and writer, he found it "not a little extraordinary that such immense tracts of land should be left

in an unprofitable state when they are everywhere intersected with turnpike roads, and are only between thirty-five and forty-five miles distant from such a market as London”.

William Cobbett, riding south to Uckfield and Lewes in 1822, was even more outspoken. “At about three miles from Grinstead, you come to a pretty village called Forest-Row, and then, on the road to Uckfield, you cross . . . a heath, with here and there a few birch scrubs upon it, verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England. This lasts you for five miles, getting, if possible uglier and uglier all the way till, at last, as if barren soil, nasty spewy gravel, heath and even that stunted, were not enough, you see . . . some black, ragged, hideous rocks”.

Today when the countryside is regarded through very different eyes, we may still marvel with Mr. Shoberl that so much undeveloped land survives near to London. We may also find it surprising that only now, after thousands of years of human history, have men begun to grasp the potential contribution to the wellbeing of the nation of extensive tracts of wild heathland, both as places for recreation, ideal for walking and riding, and as open-air laboratories for ecological education and research. When the Society of the Friends of Ashdown Forest was formed in 1961, its objects were declared to be “the benefit of all who enjoy this place, and to ensure that others will enjoy it in the future”. Reading through the vast hoards of documents concerning Ashdown Forest that have come down to us from the last seven centuries, one finds few earlier references to the area as a place that people could “enjoy”, in this sense of the word.

That the forest has survived, with its old customs and modern byelaws reflecting traditions dating from Saxon and Norman times, is largely due to the ancient rights of the Commoners, and the persistence with which their claims were defended through successive centuries. These Common rights, declared Arthur Young, “are unexceptionally the most perfect nuisance that ever blasted the improvement of a country”, and many a land speculator of the past three centuries, displaying a concern for the district that was by no means disinterested, would have agreed with him. *The Spectator*, in 1879, deplored past encroachments on the forest and thundered against those who, after the Restoration, “sought their fortune in over-reaching the inhabitants of rural districts under cover of the Royal permission”. Even as these words were printed, a note—now in the files of the Conservators—was thrust into the hands of one of the rangers. “Alfred Chapman is rebuilding a shed which was thrown down last year, and is also enclosing land. John Hobbs who lives in the Forge is adding to his garden, and Tidy is still enclosing land, though that is only what I have heard”. It is not hard to understand why Thomas Pentecost, the Victorian poet, described the forest as

“A heathy waste of huts and dens,
Where human nature seldom mends”.

Today new dangers threaten Ashdown Forest. How can the mounting public pressures of tomorrow be met without harming the interests of the Lord of the Manor, the Commoners and other local residents, or damaging the outstanding scientific value of the area? How can the changing needs of a technological age be faced without shattering that deep sense of the past that still pervades so much of the district?

For though the High Weald, unlike the Downs, offered few attractions to prehistoric settlers, some of the forest ridgeways were probably old when the Romans began constructing the London-Lewes Way through Duddleswell (Dudel's spring) and Fairwarp. A forest stream that is cutting an ever deepening valley through the soft Ashdown sand maintains a damp microclimate on a site where the rare hay-scented fern and other species have survived since the Atlantic period of about 4,000 B.C. The stream, flowing through a steep, well wooded gill forms a refuge, too, for the leafy liverwort, *Nardia compressa*, that is thought to be a relic of the last Ice Age which ended about 10,000 years ago.

Soil-climate-vegetation-animals-man, Ashdown Forest is compounded of all these elements, and if an informed public is to ensure the survival and enhancement of the area in the overcrowded world of tomorrow, it is important that more should be widely known about the turbulent and exciting past that has shaped the unique character of the district.

In the next chapter we must glance briefly at the geological nature of this Wealden landscape and the influence of the hungry soil on those who have made it their home through past centuries. Then as we look more closely at the men and women who have lived and laboured on the forest since the earliest times, we may find as I did, reading the original documents housed in the Public Record Office, the East Sussex Record Office, or in the Library of the Sussex Archaeological Society at Lewes, that the experience, to misquote Dr. A. L. Rowse, becomes all the more poignant and strangely satisfying as we peer into the eyes of their authors—and find ourselves.

II

SHAPING THE LANDSCAPE

IT is surely cause for some surprise that for the most vivid early description of the Wealden landscape, we must consult the writings of an eighth century monk of Jarrow. "I am my own secretary", wrote the Venerable Bede (A.D. 673-735), "I make my own notes and I am my own librarian", but he yet found time to illuminate a vast field of primitive learning, and it is from his writings of A.D. 731 that we learn how this district of Andred's Weald, known to the early Britons as Coit Andred and to the Romans as Sylva Anderida, was "thick and inaccessible; a place of retreat for large herds of deer and swine". Wild boars were abundant; wolves preyed on the indigenous herds of red and roe deer, and on the fallow deer which the Romans may possibly have introduced to Britain from the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe.

We know that badgers inhabited Britain 250,000 years ago, and the fact that Edward I, five centuries after Bede, granted one Thomas Peynel a licence to hunt with his own hounds the badger, fox, wild cat and hare in the royal Forest of "Ashdowne" suggests that all these creatures were common in the area. One of the oldest inhabitants, judging from its distribution throughout the British Isles, was probably the pygmy shrew; a comparative newcomer, arriving after the retreat of the semi-arctic tundra around 8,000 B.C., was the mole.

The forest lies on the Ashdown Sands of the Hastings Beds, 400 feet thick, laid down in the Lower Cretaceous period more than a 100 million years ago, and the oldest formation in the region. Recent research, including deep borings for oil and coal, have shown that under the Hastings Sands of the Weald lie up to 4,000 feet of Jurassic rocks, and beneath are the much older rocks of the Palaeozoic era which support the whole Wealden formation.

This is not the place to discuss the highly involved speculations concerning the origin and development of the structure of the region, which are briefly reviewed by Dr. S. W. Wooldridge and F. Goldring in their study of *The Weald* (1953) in the New Naturalist Series. It is thought that the Weald was formerly overlain by a huge dome of chalk that was subject to heavy erosion even as it formed, and by early Miocene times, when the area was uplifted by ripples from the main Alpine

upheavals in Europe, the forest streams were fast eroding the soils of a broad peneplain of which Crowborough Beacon (792 feet above sea level) is a survival.

Most of the Central Weald remained exposed above the waters of the Pliocene Sea that deposited sand and shingle on Headley Heath, Surrey, and on heaths around Aldershot; then following more upheavals of the earth's surface and the retreat of the sea, a series of headstreams on Ashdown Forest began to adopt the drainage pattern we know today, northwards to the Medway and south to the Sussex Ouse. The boundary between these two watersheds more or less conforms to the Nutley-Duddleswell road, though just north of Nutley is a stream that formerly fed the Ouse—until a headstream of the Medway gradually formed a loop around it and eventually captured its flow.

These forest streams, fed by an annual rainfall averaging 35 inches—an unusually high figure for the dry south-east region—were probably much broader in ancient times than they are today, and the effects of their eroding influence on the landscape has been profound. This long, slow process of erosion continues in our own time. Exploring the steep, well-wooded gills that the streams have cut in the soft sandstone rock, one may feel, to quote words that F. J. North used about Snowdonia, that the attractive nature of the landscape owes “less to the rocks that remain than to those that have been worn away”.

The vast sheets of Pleistocene ice that penetrated south to the Thames Valley in the penultimate Ice Age never reached the Weald, but the cold, dry sub-Arctic climate of this region during the last Ice Age between about 20,000 B.C. and 8,000 B.C. must have created tundra-like conditions. One most abundant plant in southern Britain at that time, to judge from pollen remains, was the beautiful anemone-like mountain avens, *Dryas octopetala*, now a familiar alpine rock plant of Snowdonia and northern Scotland.

It is possible that a reservoir of tree species may have survived the Ice Age on ground now covered by the English Channel, though this is speculation. What is certain is that the warm, dry Boreal Phase brought a rapid invasion of the English Lowlands by silver birch and Scots pine. Perhaps after about 7,000 B.C., hazel became more abundant than it has ever been before or since. Elm, and then oak and lime increased, and alder advanced down the valleys.

During the succeeding wet, warm Atlantic Phase, oak forest became dominant over much of the Weald, the Scots pine retreated, and extensive areas of alder carr developed in the valleys. It was during this period that the two mosses, *Diphyscium foliosum* and *Hyocomium flagellare*, must have colonised the parish of Duddleswell where they survive today.

It may be significant that most of the tree trunks found embedded in the peat bogs of the forest have proved to be oak or Scots pine. Beech was a later invader,

though it was certainly thriving in the region during the Bronze Age (2,000 B.C.) if not before. Sycamore, which now dominates some sites around the forest, was not introduced to Britain until the thirteenth century, and the familiar sweet chestnut may have been brought into Sussex from southern Europe by the Romans. The horse-chestnut, which is in no way related to the sweet or Spanish chestnut, was not grown here before the sixteenth century.

Examination of the ashes and charcoal left behind by the Mesolithic hunters who penetrated as far as Buxted and other places in the Central Weald shows that they burned mainly hazel, oak and hawthorn. There is no firm evidence that Neolithic man ever lived on the forest, but we do know that he hunted there. Dr. E. C. Curwen has pointed out that of the 726 flint arrow heads found on the Forest ridge,* 98 per cent. come from the Tunbridge Wells Sands between Horsham and Peas Pottage, while the extensive stretch of Ashdown Sands around Crowborough, Buxted and beyond have yielded only 21.

Evidence of Iron Age enclosures can be found near Gill's Lap and King's Standing; and eight miles away on the Tunbridge Wells Sand of Saxonbury Hill, near Frant, are the remains of a fortified Iron Age camp, similar in date to the one at Pipers Copse, Kirdford, in West Sussex. These are generally regarded as mining camps that were protected against wolves as well as human intruders.

Much has been made of the fact that the higher slopes of Ashdown Forest, with their light, hungry soils far above the water table, and exposed to strong winds, are not favourable to tree growth. Yet it would surely be wrong to visualise these forest heights in prehistoric times as exposed heathland, for if rigorously protected from fire or grazing, the ground is promptly colonised by silver birch and other pioneer species which offer protection to fairly open mixed oak scrub. Dr. G. W. Dimbleby has produced much archaeological and ecological evidence to suggest that most south country heathland in Surrey and West Sussex was cleared of woodland during the Bronze Age around 2,000 B.C., though it has been argued that open heathland may have formed the natural climatic climax on a few Mesolithic sites like Blackdown. Ashdown Forest was almost certainly cleared at a much later date. The first fellings for the iron industry may have occurred during the Iron Age, though the more extensive clearance of the forest seems not to have developed before the 11th century.

We can only speculate about the appearance of the forest in these early days, but it is probably safe to assume that while the lower slopes comprised dense mixed oak woodland, and the heights were covered by light open woodland with low scrub, the valleys were largely inaccessible alder swamps where movement was difficult for man and beast.

*The Forest Ridge is the high ground stretching eastwards from the Horsham area.

The Romans found small nomadic bands working the iron ore of the district, to which access was gained along the forest ridgeways. The primitive method used in smelting the ore involved the construction on a sandstone floor of a beehive-shaped bloomery comprising successive layers of charcoal and ore. Some of the tracks they followed may first have been trodden firm by the badgers, deer and foxes; now the practical Roman engineers were to adapt and improve many of them, and to construct new ones with their customary skill.

Most of the older tracks followed the forest ridge from east to west; the Romans were soon to ease access to the important iron-producing districts of East Grinstead and Maresfield by opening routes running north to south. Thanks to the brilliant field work of Mr. I. D. Margary, summarised in his classic *Roman Ways in the Weald* (Phoenix House, 1965, third impression) we can follow in some detail the course of the London-Lewes Way, which was probably made soon after A.D. 100 or even earlier.

A portion of the road at Holtye, Hartfield, is particularly well preserved. Sheet erosion of the soil during centuries of ploughing has produced a protective covering of earth, and ancient wheel-marks as well as the tracks of a small stream can be seen on the slag-metalled surface. This section of the road is now owned by the Sussex Archaeological Trust.

Entering Ashdown Forest at Chuck Hatch, the road penetrates to within a hundred yards of Five Hundred Acre Wood before crossing the heath to Camp Hill. Beyond the crossroads, the route is marked by a line of hedgerows behind Streater's Farm—"dweller by the street"—before passing just east of Duddleswell cricket ground and on to a point 240 yards north of Fairwarp Church, where it crosses to the west side of the modern road, leaving the open heath near Old Workhouse Farm, Fairwarp.

Despite war-time manoeuvres on the forest by tanks, when much damage was inflicted on the turf and on the archaeological remains that it protected, traces of the aggers or banks, the sandstone metalling and side ditches may still be seen at many points. Ancient footpaths may prove less durable. A change in social habits like the acquisition of bicycles and then cars by farmworkers, and the decline of the rabbit in 1954, have resulted in the disappearance of many old tracks. Yet some ancient trackways survive for centuries, and the walker who explores the forest heights around Crowborough and Nutley may well find himself on primitive ridgeways to Chelwood Gate and Wych Cross that were old when the Romans were working the forge at Oldlands Farm, Maresfield, where coins dating from the time of Nero, Vespasian, Tetricus and Diocletian were discovered in the last century.

Forty years ago a Roman furnace of the First Century A.D., was found on the yellow Wadhurst Clay—a prime source of iron—near the River Medway at Ridge

Hill Manor, East Grinstead. The fuel burnt at this site included plum and ash, as well as oak, birch and hazel.

Little is known of the forest in Saxon times, when it appears to have stretched almost as far south as Pevensey. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in A.D. 893, described it as extending 120 miles from east to west and 30 miles from north to south. Saxon coins, discovered early in the last century in a peat bog at Duddleswell, and an ancient boat, 30 feet long, fashioned out of oak, and embedded above the slopes of a Maresfield valley, offer evidence of early human expeditions into the forest.

At the Norman Conquest Ashdown Forest came within the Rape of Pevensey, which was granted by William the Conqueror to his half brother, Robert, Earl of Moretain. The forest is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, but it is recorded that the Lords of the various Manors in the neighbourhood received 719 hogs, which implies that some 7,000 pigs must have been turned out to eat the acorns, beechmast and coarse herbage of the forest. With the advent to power of William Rufus, the Earl of Moretain was callously driven from Pevensey Castle by famine, whereupon the King granted some of his privileges to the Abbey of Grestein in Normandy, including pannage for hogs, herbage for cattle and timber for the repair of churches and houses and for fuel.

There are other early records of donations of forest lands and rights to religious houses, including the grant of pasture, pannage and timber to the Priories of Wilmington and Michelham, whose buildings are now preserved by the Sussex Archaeological Trust. Henry I granted the castle and forest of Pevensey to the De Aquilas, and it was the third D'Aquila, in 1229, who founded the Priory of Michelham, with its six-acre moat in the valley of the Cuckmere, and endowed it with the park of Pevensey. Later records show that the Prior was allowed to run 60 cows and a bull on land in the forest where the Rector of Maresfield grazed 16 cows and a bull.

It is more than likely that by this time the common rights of the peasant farmers living on the fringes of Ashdown Forest were already firmly based upon traditional practices that possibly pre-dated the modern conception of private property. It has sometimes been suggested that the Norman Kings acknowledged the claims of the commoners in compensation for the severities of the forest laws, or as a reward for feeding the wild deer in winter, but it is hard to imagine William the Conqueror and his successors being so sensitive about the lot of the medieval peasants, as Dr. W. G. Hoskins has argued.

It is easier to believe that common rights are a legacy from earlier times—and the rights of the commoners in parts of Kent have been traced back to the fifth and sixth centuries. It is more than likely that the Normans found it preferable to

tolerate the rights of the Commoners of Ashdown Forest, which were obviously vital to the peasant economy, rather than to provoke needless disorders by suppressing them. Denied the right to graze cattle and swine on the forest, would not the peasants of the neighbourhood have faced starvation?

Attempts to reduce certain of their rights were made late in the thirteenth century by William de Fawkham, bailiff and chief forester to Peter of Savoy, who had become Lord of the Honor of Aquila, its castle and forest, in 1245. The free tenants found themselves called upon to serve on inquisitions of "the timber felled in the Forest of Asshedoune", a duty formerly thrust upon them only by the King.

We know from a survey of 1273—five years after the district had been vested in the Crown—that the 208 customary tenants living on the edge of the forest were entitled to take all windfall wood within their "communia", except when the wind had torn it up by the roots, in which case it belonged to the King. They might take their carts into the forest in search of drift wood any time between Hockday—the second Tuesday after Easter—and Michaelmas, but not during the winter. They could collect brushwood, furze and broom for fuel, "and if it be necessary for the improvement of their common pasture they may burn all the aforesaid", hence the traditional custom of firing the gorse to create fresh pasture in late winter and spring. The results of this practice are discussed in a later chapter.

They could graze on their "communia" as much stock as it was possible to maintain on their own holdings in winter, a way of ensuring that no commoner claimed more than his fair share of the pasture to the detriment of his neighbours' interests. For the six weeks between Michaelmas and Martinmas the stock had to be kept out of the woods, for the benefit of the King's game, on pain of being impounded.

Commoners could also let all the swine they could support themselves in winter forage in the forest throughout the year, except during the fence month—the fawning time of deer during the fifteen days before and after the Feast of St. John the Baptist on June 24. Every year at Martinmas, all swine had to be brought to the pound for pannage—and the word was used for the annual payment made for the grazing of the swine as well as for the custom of turning them out to graze on the woodland seed and herbage. Younger stock might be charged at a 1½d., 1d. or a ½d., according to age.

If any customary tenant possessed ten swine, the King could claim the best one, or he might charge twopence for each pig. In fact, few Commoners owned more than five or six swine, though the total number grazing in the forest in 1292 was put at 2,784, all belonging to "foreigners", as the tenants of neighbouring Manors were called.

These “foreigners” were allowed no more than rights of pasture or herbage for cattle and pannage for swine. Only the free tenants of the King’s Manors of Duddleswell and Maresfield, or inter-tenants of these or neighbouring Manors who had houses on the forest, were entitled to glean fallen timber.

Foraging swine together with the large herds of deer must have hindered the growth of young trees on ground where much timber had been felled for repairs to Pevensey Castle and for local farm buildings. In 1298, John de Winterselle, the bailiff, cut 7,000 laths from timber out of Maresfield Park, and 2,000 laths and 150 props from “Essesdon Forest” were carted to Pevensey for the restoration of the royal free chapel that was panelled with 400 beech boards from the same woodland.

It is curious that the foresters’ records during this period—and more of them are quoted in the *Victoria County History of Sussex*, Volume II—usually refer to beech rather than oak, though payments for the acorn pannage in Maresfield Park show that oaks were abundant there. Beech was clearly the dominant species on much of the poorer soil to the north, and since the felling of mature beech often leaves neighbouring trees susceptible to damage from wind-blow, it is not surprising to find the fierce gale of 1362 causing much destruction in “Assesdon Forest”. Timber thieves, too, were a constant problem.

The survey of 1273 had shown how one master forester with his servant “and eight other serjeants and not less” could manage the forest for wages that varied from 4d a day for a master forester to 2d for a riding forester or 1d for others. These men were also entitled to certain perquisites such as the removal of the honey that was made by wild bees in hollow trees.

Then, in 1372, as mentioned in the Introduction, Edward III granted what was now known as the “Forest of Ashdon” to his third son, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in exchange for the Earldom of Richmond. By then some wide stretches of the local landscape had begun to display the more open aspect that we know today, a fact reflected in diminishing records of the sale of timber. Yet many old beeches and coverts of silver birch and willow had survived. The Commoners living on the edge of the forest were able to help themselves to two free wagon loads of alder, birch or willow for each household “agaynste the feste of Crysmase”.

We do not know when this royal Free Chase, an unenclosed portion of a forest set apart for sport, was imparked. But for the next three centuries it was to be known as Lancaster Great Park.

III

LANCASTER GREAT PARK

The new owner of Ashdown Forest may have been no stranger to the district. He probably stayed from time to time at the royal palace or hunting lodge that Edward II is thought to have built within the parish of Maresfield. John of Gaunt was now to enlarge it, and to make it his headquarters for numerous hunting expeditions in the forest.

Reading the annals of his life, one can only marvel at the mobility of the nation's leaders at this time. Despite the roughness of the roads and the widespread disorders that culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, we find him riding vast distances from one Duchy estate to another. Many of his earlier years had been spent overseas; now he was to parley with the Scots in the far north, ride back to his great Savoy Palace in what is now the Strand, London, and which was soon to be razed to the ground by the rebels; and soon afterwards he is sailing to Calais or visiting Sussex where "the Lords, Barons, Gentlemen and Freeholders, each ready for the chase with their hounds", would be awaiting him.

Perhaps we are inclined to over-stress the lawlessness of the period, for the Duchy records show that, not only did John of Gaunt travel extensively without coming to harm, but valuable goods were sometimes transported long distances with no more than two or three horsemen in attendance. His estates in Sussex escaped the worst disorders that set so much of East Anglia aflame; but even here we find a sharp drop in the revenue of the local Manors during the year of the uprising.

We know that Edward II, in 1324, executed two deeds and wrote several letters while staying at his Nutley Hunting Lodge, including a letter to the Pope. It was during these visits, if local traditions are to be believed, that he paused on high ground north of Duddleswell while herds of deer were driven before him, hence the name King's Standing—the hunter's station from which to shoot game. Variations of the tale involve other monarchs.

The Beasts of the Forest in this century, to quote an inquisition of 1310, were the red deer hart and hind, the boar and the wolf. The Beasts of the Chase were the fallow buck and doe, the fox, martron (pine marten) and the roe deer; while the Beasts and Fowls of the Warren were the hare, conie or rabbit, pheasant and partridge. The prices paid for rabbits at this time suggest that they were not

generally plentiful, though the Normans had probably introduced them from Spain in earlier centuries, and villagers at Ovingdean, barely twenty miles south of the forest, were complaining that a hundred acres of arable crops had been "annihilated" by rabbits. A royal Coney Warren at Gardine Hill, Hartfield, extended to 86 acres.

Much trouble was taken by the Duke's servants to protect birds of prey. Even the abundant sparrow hawk, so much less precious than the goshawk or peregrine falcon, was deemed worthy of a reward of 2s. to a forester who had protected a pair. The Duchy records contain several references to sparrow hawks in the forest being seized for royal falconers. Poachers also captured the birds on occasions, and there were complaints, too, to be echoed in every century, of their depredations of deer, pheasants and partridges. A copy of the Duchy of Lancaster Assize Rolls in the Library at Barbican House, Lewes, describes how Francis Challenor, in 1583, killed a stag within the forest bounds after a long pursuit that brought the poacher in to his home parish of Lindfield. One Richard Leukenore, "chivaler", captured with his harriers a "sour"—a four year old fallow buck—in the vicinity of Plawhatch, while Andrew Mulssh, "an evildoer in parks and chases", took a staggar—a young red deer stag of four seasons—at "Mayeslond" in the same forest.

The whereabouts of the royal hunting lodge has attracted much attention. The Free Chapel of Maresfield, which probably served it, was apparently built in the wood, half a mile west of Nutley, which is known to this day as Chapel Wood; and its position is clearly marked on an Elizabethan map in the Chapter House of Chichester Cathedral. The Rev. Edward Turner, writing in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections* for 1862, suggested that it had been built by Richard D'Aquila, who endowed it with sixty acres of land on the forest known as Prestridge—Priest Ridge—near Wych Cross. The same benefactor erected the original parish church of Maresfield. There is a local tradition that John Wycliffe sought refuge in the district and preached there in the days of John of Gaunt.

The Chapel was no longer used in 1541, for the Account Books of the Church Wardens at Maresfield show that the Parish Church then possessed both vestments and also "a chalyce sometyme belonging to the Chappelle of Notlye". The ancient font was found about 1800 beneath two feet of soil; it was promptly lost again, only to be re-discovered half a century later serving as a cattle trough on a local farm. Ruined walls of the chapel, some of them six feet high, were standing less than two centuries ago.

Vechary Wood, on a ridge lying across the valley to the north of the chapel, is often claimed to be the site of the royal hunting lodge. As recently as 1902, the Rev. C. N. Sutton, in his *Historical Notes of Withyham, Hartfield and Ashdown*

Forest, writes: "The ruins of John of Gaunt's Castle are still to be seen in the Vechery Wood belonging to Mr. Douglas Freshfield, of Kidbrooke Park". Unfortunately, the habit of filching stone from ruined buildings has long been all too common in the district, and several old properties on the forest, such as Beggars' Den, near Lavendar Platt, suffered in the same way.

Was this also the fate of Dudeney Chapel? Hogg's *Picturesque Views of the Antiquities of England and Wales*, 1786, contains an engraving of a ruined medieval building that is described as Dudeney Chapel on Ashdown Forest. No details of such a structure are known, but in 1855, the remains of a fairly extensive building that appeared to be ecclesiastical in style were found beneath a shaw bordering a field south-west of Duddleswell crossroads, and early ordnance maps denote a chapel there. Turner reported the find in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 1857, but he never saw the ruins and could give no precise details.

Glancing through the Duchy records, one finds a strange reference to this area in the form of a Charter confirming John of Gaunt's possession of the townships of East Grinstead and Seaford. These places, to quote Sir Robert Somerville, the present Clerk to the Duchy, "were delivered to him under the mistaken notion that they were part either of Maresfield Manor or of the Castle and Leucate of Pevensey",—leucate being the district attached to a castle.*

Under the great Charter of the Duchy, John of Gaunt could claim the chattels of felons, all waifs and strays and, by a custom of the time, all deodands—movable objects, including animals, that had inadvertently caused a man's death. While the Duke's tenants were bound to him by royal service, it should not be forgotten that he possessed certain obligations to them. He had to maintain their mills and houses in fair condition, to provide for the dispersal of flood waters and to ensure that the streams and rivers were embanked.

Problems concerning the pasturing of cattle—agistment—on the forest and pannage for swine were dealt with by the Aveshold Court or Swainmote, held on the Tuesday after All Saints' Day, when the tenants paid their aves money for the past year. The Woodmote, a forest court that assembled every forty days—though in later years this was reduced to an annual session three weeks after All Saints' Day—reviewed such controversial matters as incroachments and the depredations by "Spoylers of game or wood". In addition, an annual Sheriff's Court was long held on Berwick Common, on the Lewes-Eastbourne road, on the Thursday after Whit-Sunday, and each Hundred had to send its Alderman, with twelve just men, to report all abuses.

It is impossible for us to gauge how the people of the district received the news of John of Gaunt's death at Leicester in 1399, when his body was brought south to

*Somerville, R. *The Duchy of Lancaster*, London, 1953.

old St. Paul's for burial. Some modern critics have condemned him as a small man cast for a role that was beyond his powers, or as neither particularly good nor bad by the standards of his time. The strong associations with him that so many places possess imply that he was no feeble character; and there were old people living in Nutley late in the last century who used to talk almost affectionately of "King John" as if they had known him personally!

On his death the Duchy was vested in the Crown, and Ashdown Forest remained in its possession until the Restoration. But the vast forest of Anglo-Saxon times had shrunk, the woods around Waldron and Poynings and even the Manor of Fletching having passed into other hands.

The early bailiffs of the forest—men like John de la Rude and John de Waukeford or Thomas Culpeper of Lindfield—had been active within the district; soon it became the custom to appoint some person of standing who was not necessarily a resident of Sussex, and to leave the administration of the area in the hands of a Master of the Forest. He was served by a complement of rangers, verderers and masters of the game. This last post, during the reign of Henry VIII, was held by Thomas Henslow of Lindfield, father of the Philip Henslow who was to partner Edward Alleyn at the Rose Theatre on Bankside. There is some evidence that in later years the Kidders of Maresfield became hereditary holders of the office of Master of the Game.

The deterioration of the soil that must have begun with the clearance of the protective covering of trees had become most marked by this time. "It is a barren ground", recorded a survey of the period, "and hathe no covert of any underwood saving great Trees and in some of the Covers birchen Trees. Itm. There is no faire launde in it but only hethes". There were said to be 300 "Redde Dere" and many more fallow deer. Roe deer are not mentioned and they may well have dwindled to local extinction, though it is possible that they never completely vanished from the West Sussex woods around Petworth.

Many complaints by the people of the district were expressed at the "Coorte holden at Notlye" on October 10, 1519. It was pointed out to the King's officers that "all the byrche wood between Notlye and Fayre Wharpe (Fairwarp) hathe bene felede". Thirty loads of timber had been taken from the South Ward, "to the grete hurte of the Kynge and his tenantese", and disposed of at Lewes and other places by the rangers. Again, the King's highway near Plawhatch had been blocked, and one Rycharde Somnore had inclosed 24 acres of woods and other land "abowte Dudellsewell". He had also grazed sheep on the forest "which is contrary to the custome". The fact that sheep as a rule are not commonable in a forest—though there have long been some forests where the tradition was defied—may be due to their close grazing of the pasture.

The Commoners did not confine their remarks to complaints. They also offered constructive suggestions. Emphasising their claim to wood that had been "caste downe with the winde" they proposed that sometime between Hockday on the second Tuesday after Easter and Michaelmas, "the Marshall of the Kyngese foreste do blowe his horne in the hieghte of the sowthe warde abowte the sone Rysynge; and then Everye forstere (forester) . . . do blowe lyke wise that then everye of the Kyngese tenantese may assemble to marcke the sayde wood and that wood do cary home for there fewell".

This matter was urgent. Unless something was done there would soon be little beechmast and few acorns for the swine, nor enough fuel for the Commoners. And the cause of the trouble was that the trees were being "cut downe and made Colle for the Irne myllese".





IV

WEALDEN BLACK COUNTRY

THERE was an iron industry in Sussex before the Romans came, as we noted in earlier chapters, and there is ample evidence that they were quick to exploit it. Yet no records of iron-working in the area exist for Saxon times, and the Domesday Book mentions but one iron-mine—which was in the hundred of East Grinstead. As late as 1225, we find a faithful steward to the Bishop of Chichester advising him to obtain iron from the Forest of Dean, where most of the craftsmen of London secured their supplies, and any possibility of procuring it from the forest seems not to have been mentioned.

In 1254, however, the sheriff of Sussex called upon the County's ironmasters to provide Henry III with 30,000 horse-shoes and 60,000 nails. Around 1300, some London ironmongers were complaining of the short weight in the iron bars bought from the Weald, but the local industry was soon to increase in size, reputation and efficiency, particularly towards the end of the fifteenth century. While it was the craftsmen of South-East England who first developed the blast furnace, it was French experts from Normandy and Picardy who now showed how the ore could be smelted in a blast furnace blown by bellows worked by water power. Rivers and streams that had long turned the wheels of mills grinding corn were now converted to drive the hammers in the forges. When William Camden (1551-1623) visited the Weald, he found it "full of iron mines in sundry places", with "furnaces on every side . . . to which purpose diverse brookes in many places are brought to runne in one chanell, and sundry meadowes turned into pooles and waters, that they might bee of power sufficient to drive hammer milles".

He was clearly shocked at the way "a huge deale of wood is yearly spent"—and as long ago as 1494, Peter Robert, alias Graunt Pierre, iron-founder of Hartfield, had secured a lease that entitled him to take as much wood as necessary in exchange for an annual rent to the Duchy of £20, or six tons of iron. Yet what startled Camden almost as much was the noise. The hammers, "beating upon the iron, resound all over the places adjoining".

It is only fair to add that descriptions of the district as the Black Country of the day may be a shade misleading. While this was an important national industry—and the ironworks at Sheffield Park in 1549 alone employed 26 men—the Weald was

still a green and partly untamed countryside in which a man might work at the forge through most of the day and yet find time to turn out pigs or a cow or two on the forest.

The Court Rolls of Lambeth Palace for 1492 record payment of “£67 0s 2d to ye Ierne founders of Buxtede” where, in 1543,

“Master Huggett and his man John
They did make the first can-non”.

Ralph Huggett or Hogge was a servant of the Parson of Buxted, the Rev. William Levett, who employed him to work the furnace and supply molten iron while one Peter Baude was the skilled gun founder there.

Other important furnaces that were among the first to use water power were at Hartfield and Newbridge, in the heart of Ashdown Forest. The local craftsmen owed much to the expertise of the French specialists, of whom there were no fewer than 40 working in the Weald in 1544, when Henry VIII, who was about to make war on France, required from them an oath of allegiance to the Crown or departure to their home country.

The history of the industry has been so well documented by Dr. L. F. Salzman, in the *Victoria County History of Sussex* (1907) and by Ernest Straker in *Wealden Iron* (1931)—a book now fetching £12 12s 0d on the second-hand market—that there is no need to repeat their findings here. One of the most interesting eyewitness accounts of the processes employed in the forges came from the pen of John Ray, (1627-1705), surely the greatest of all English naturalists, who lived for a time at Cuckfield as Tutor to Timothy Burrell, son of a wealthy ironmaster. He noticed how one man and a boy might make two tons of iron in a week, placing charcoal and ore in layers one above the other and beating the iron into small pieces before melting it in the furnace until it poured out into the hearth.

No fewer than “14 drawynge oxen” were employed by the Sheffield Park iron-works for hauling the products of the forge, and it was often a sore point with the natives of the district that the roads were frequently left in an appalling state. It was sometimes said that Sussex women were long in the leg, because of the struggles they had to pull their feet out of the mud.

Yet when Richard Pedley, messenger of the Privy Council, was ordered, in 1574, to inquire into “the great spoile and consumption of oakes and other woodes in the countys of Sussex, Surrey and Kent by means of iron milles and furnaces”, he visited the owners of 77 ironworks, including those at West Hoathly, East Grinstead, Hartfield, Buxted and Maresfield, in the course of 19 days. Altogether he rode 483 miles, “but not on Sundayes”. Perhaps the highway toll of 3s per three cartloads of charcoal or ore, or one ton of iron taken a mile on any road, had some effect.

Fortunately, good use was made of the Ouse and Medway for transporting the products of the industry, which included large quantities of guns. With the fall of Calais in 1588, and the cutting off of supplies of munitions from France, the Sussex gun founders became busier than ever—and so were the smugglers. “There be divers and sundrye merchants”, complained a correspondent of the Privy Council, in 1573, “. . . that doe find themselves marvelously molested and otherwise robbed by the reason of the great store of ordinnance that hath been conveyed and solde to strangers out of the realme, whereby their shipes are so well appointed that no poor merchantshippe may pass through the seas”. Next year 77 iron-masters from the Weald were called upon to appear before the Privy Council and solemnly promise not to make or sell guns for foreigners without a royal licence.

The smuggling continued; and in 1601, Sir Walter Raleigh told Parliament that “heretofore one ship of her Majesty was able to beat ten Spanish, but now by reason of our own ordnance, we are badly matcht one to one”.

The local iron industry rapidly declined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There were about 25 furnaces in the Weald in 1664, but only 11 of them were working. Competition from the English Midlands as coal-mining developed, and from Sweden, France, Germany and Spain is probably the prime reason for the failure, though some authorities have implied that the wealthy Sussex iron-masters were not always notable for enterprise, and productivity surged ahead in the Midlands in a way seldom equalled in the south. A shortage of water power in the dry South-East region at certain seasons could possibly have hindered the industry, and Daniel Defoe hinted that the French ironmasters possessed a marked advantage over our own in that their workers were content with “an onion, a draught of water, a bunch of grapes and a piece of bread”, whereas the Sussex ironworkers wanted beef and pudding.

Ashburnham, outside the forest, was the last Wealden furnace to function. Lady Dorothy Nevill, in her book *Under Five Reigns*, has recorded how it was closed in 1809 owing “to the failure of a foundryman, through intoxication, to mix chalk with the ore, by reason of which it ceased to flow, and the blasting finally ended.”

As late as 1858, there was talk in the forest villages of efforts to revive the industry. Ore was again mined in Snape Wood, Wadhurst, and the experiment was even tried of transporting it to Staffordshire, of all places, but the project was soon abandoned. Today, innumerable splendid fire-backs—and a particularly fine collection can be seen at Anne of Cleve’s House Museum, Lewes—the iron grave slabs in the churchyards at Wadhurst, West Hoathly, East Grinstead, Hartfield, Maresfield, Rotherfield and Uckfield, a series of attractive hammer-ponds, and many evocative place names are almost all that remain of a once powerful national industry centred around Ashdown Forest.

V

THE LAWLESS YEARS

THE lives of the law-abiding seldom make "news", and the records of the Duchy of Lancaster are as silent about them as any modern newspaper might be. The point is worth making, for the documents concerning Ashdown Forest that have come down to us from past centuries contain so much information about illegal inclosures of land, illicit felling of timber, the smuggling of guns and spirits, the poaching of deer and game birds, the unfair denial of common rights, or the claiming of such rights by persons not entitled to them, that one might suppose that the forest through the ages had been occupied only by the lawless.

A more accurate picture emerges if we recognise that the records of any period are necessarily silent about the countless acts of honesty, compassion and generosity that constantly occur in almost any closely-knit community. True, there is no denying that man is a contradiction, and it is possible that some people who appeared to be most respectable on Sundays were not above a little quiet poaching or smuggling on Mondays. The Sussex peasantry never lacked courage. They could be as stubborn as their own oxen, and as reluctant to accept change as any nervous animal. They also had a habit of saying "Yes" when they meant "No", and vice versa.

Anyone familiar with their descendants of the past fifty years would probably agree that most country people possess a profound and innate commonsense and a spirit of caution that may be prompted by the silent recollection of past hardships. "In the old days, it must have been terribly unpleasant to be poor", an Edwardian Rector of Withyham used to tell his congregation; and many of those who sometimes helped themselves to game birds or deer or timber that did not belong to them might have claimed with some truth that it was only dire necessity that drove them to it.

There were also those who, perhaps with less cause, constantly annoyed their neighbours. When officers of King Henry VIII held that Court "at Notlye" in 1519, they were told how an unnamed felon had stolen a mare worth 20 shillings and taken it to "Notlye and there Rychard Somnore toocke the sayde mare and lete the sayde felone Escape, and keepethe the mare to his owne use and doothe dayly Ryde upon her". He had also kept a stray cow off the forest belonging to one

Thomas Ahothe, and he was selling windfall timber, though commoners were entitled only to use it on their own holdings.

Again, the King's own foresters had "feled and cut down manye owlde grete beechese to burne", to the "grete distruccon of the Kyngese woodese". Indeed, quite one third of the forest had been felled, and not only for the iron works. Some "feyre oaks" had been cut down to make new palings between Chelwood Gate and Mill Brook, and too often it was His Majesty's own foresters who "tacke all the profyte". Moreover these men consistently ignored the traditional customs of the forest, allowing their own stock to graze during the fence month when the deer dropped their fawns, and permitting large numbers of bullocks, oxen, horses and hogs of strangers to graze within the forest, though "howe the Kynge is answered of the profyte we knowe not".

There had been other troubles. The boughs of oaks felled for "owre church of Mausfelde"—and "the sed Reve did fell an ocke at the Rydene style to macke raylese and postese"—had been carried away by John Kydere, the Elder. They pleaded, too, that the Master Chamberlain "owght to leve suffyciente maste for owre swine".

Many of these protests are echoed in the deliberations of a Commission of enquiry appointed in the last months of Henry VIII's reign. In a preamble to instructions addressed to Edward Gage, son of Sir John Gage who was Comptroller of the King's Household and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to John Sackville, the King expresses concern at "the great wast and distruccon . . . daily made in our Forest of Ashdowne as well of our woods as of our game". The Commission was charged with the tasks of surveying the woods and underwood, enquiring into the extent of recent destruction and other matters.

They found that the South Ward still contained a hundred acres of woodland as well as 200 acres of underwood, and there were another 20 acres of timber in "Pippyngworth walke and Dalyngreye walke". They regretted the way pigs were allowed to forage in the woods throughout the year "to the grete hyndraunce of the Kyng's game . . ." and of his tenants who "beseeche to have redresse".

Then they considered the case of William Bruges, a keeper. He had killed and given to his friends a fallow doe, a red deer stag and a hind, and "there were diverse times at his lodge pasties of venison". He firmly denied these charges. True, he had killed a fallow fawn, but the animal had been shot in error when he was attempting to slay a doe for which a Mr. Fraunkwell held a warrant. As for the felling of trees, these were silver birches and alders that "be dead in the topgrowing" and he and other keepers, time out of mind, had always been allowed to fell a reasonable number for their own use, this being "all the fee and wage the said keepers hath". Altogether he had cut down 120 birches in the previous five years,

all small trees and dead in the crown. The felling of five oaks were another matter. These had been cut down by licence of Edmund Hensley and were used solely for repairing the lodge at Duddleswell.

We do not know the decisions of the Commissioners. We only know that the depredations continued. While landowners and farmers beyond the bounds of the forest complained of damage inflicted by marauding deer, poaching made increasing inroads into their numbers and, no doubt, caused disturbance that resulted in the dispersal of the animals. One night, to quote an example, twenty men assembled at Hartfield under cover of darkness, "having with them divers and many greyhounds, crossbows and arrows, long bows and arrows, pikes, forks, bills and clubs and arrayed with coats of fenses and skulls of iron". Soon after midnight the gang "in a most riotous manner did chase Her Majesty's deer"—the property of Queen Mary—"and did kill one Red deer and four fallow deer and carried them away, and wounded and ill-treated the keepers of the said deer".

Within two months 26 "evil-doers" accounted for eight fallow deer, while a third gang pursued the deer and wounded keepers after assembling "in a place called Duddles".

Ditches and banks decayed, posts and fences collapsed, and more valuable trees were felled without authority. In 1605, the Master of the Game, Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, and descendant of Jordon de Sackville who had held the poor pasture and pannage of Buckhurst Park early in the reign of Edward I, pleaded with King James I for a new Commission that would organise the repair of the forest fences, thereby preserving "the game in which the King delights".

His request was heeded and "our trustie and well beloved Sir George Rivers, Knight, Richard Amherst and Thomas Pope" were required "at tymes convenient to you to repair yourselves to our forrest of Ashedowne", there thoroughly and diligently "as well by oathe, Juries, evidence, perambulation, examinacon of witnesses . . . and all such other good waies and meanes" to discover the facts and report to the Chancellor and Council of the Duchy "in our Duchie chamber att our Palace of Westminster in the morrowe after the feast of St. Martyn next comying, or sooner if you can convenientlie, nott faylinge hereof as wee truste you".

Their task was no light one. They had to establish which persons possessed the right of estovers—the collection of wood for fuel and repairs—and how much each man could reasonably claim; what persons possessed rights of pasture; what cottages had been erected without lawful authority and by whom, and who now occupied them.

It was at Duddleswell that they met "so manie honest and lawfull men of the said county of Sussex as will make upp a suficient and substantiall Jurie" and began their searching enquiries. They were promptly informed of the various common

rights of the free tenants of Duddleswell and Maresfield Manors, and the more limited rights of the inter-tenants and the foreign tenants. They acknowledged that between the feasts of St. Michael and St. Martin, "noe manner of Cattell shall come within the said forrest because of the preservacion of bushes and maste" and that any found during that period would be impounded and released only on payment of a penny. They held that the agistment of "straingers cattel and pannage for their swine" should be rated at terms to be negotiated by the forest officers "to the King's most benyfit".

Certain persons were found to possess special privileges in return for past services in the forest. Thus Nicolas Rootes, of Marshals', a tenant of John Gage who had now acquired the Manor of Maresfield from the Crown, claimed five loads of wood for fuel each year. Rights to pasture or fallen timber were admitted, too, for more than a hundred people in Fletching, 32 in "Eastgreensted", seven in "West Hodelye" and three in "Horsted Caines", among others.

Their report may have brought about some improvement in the situation for in the first four decades of the seventeenth century, according to the findings of later commissions, some of the woodlands began to recover from the heavy fellings of the previous century, the lodges and fences were in good repair, and the forest was well stocked with red and fallow deer.

The position rapidly deteriorated during the Civil War. Indiscriminate felling of timber increased, fences decayed and the poaching of deer was again rife. The Commonwealth Parliament lost no time in appointing able and conscientious Commissioners whose survey leaves us with an impressive mass of detail, produced in 1650.

They seem to have ridden or walked for many miles around the forest, noting how "a small rivilett or brooke" divided Chelwood Common, observing how the officers of the locality would periodically organise a drive across Crowborough Common, Horney Common and other heathland when all cattle and horses that were not the property of the Commoners were impounded. Management problems of this kind were discussed at the regular sessions of the Court Baron, while the Aves Court on the Tuesday after All Saints' Day dealt with payment for the pasturing of cattle, the Woodmote Court with incroachments and poaching, and the annual Sherrieff's Court, still held on Berwick Common, concerned "all publique abuses", to quote the Commissioners.

Reading between the lines, one suspects that they were surprised at the local custom whereby tenants of the Duchy who kept a draught of oxen were allowed to graze two mares and a colt on the forest throughout the summer, on payment of one penny, and another penny for "one other horse or mare to go to mill", though for other horses or mares the charge was 6d. A Commoner without a team could graze

only one mill horse on the forest for an annual fee of 1d, a rule which applied to inter-tenants and "foreigners" as well as to tenants of the Manor of Duddleswell. The latter, as well as their two free loads of birch and alder "against the feast of Cristmas", claimed free bote—the Saxon word for estovers—of additional birch, alder and also beech; brushwood—frith and tennet—for the repair of hedges; a hundred loads of marl for one penny; free mud for their walls, stone to underpin their houses, and "fearne" with which to roof them.

The Commissioners were not happy about the claims lodged by "foreigners" of "Bucksted, Fletching, Horsteed Canes and West Hothly"; nor were they satisfied at the way Sir John Gage had been felling timber and inclosing land for the erection of cottages "by what right wee know not".

The six keepers, they found, had lawfully let the forest grazing for some 600 cattle and 200 horses as well as their own stock, and a further 140 cattle and 60 horses grazed the grounds of Old Lodge and White House which a former Ranger, Sir Henry Compton, had partly demolished twelve years earlier, so that it was now worth no more than £30, though fish in the White House ponds "wee value at £50". A considerable number of deer had lately been "disposed of for the use of the Commonwealth", but there still existed herds of red and fallow deer numbering 120 beasts and officially valued at £120. The timber and underwood were estimated to be worth £620, and three new cottages that had "incroached" were valued at 23s. 4d.

There is a note of compassion about their comments on the occupiers. "The said Pollard and Hever are poore, especially the said Hever having three children, and both have been at charges in building the said cottages and fencing ye plotts of ground . . . therefore we doe conceive the said widdow especially to be pittied and considered". Eight other cottages were regarded with less favour. They were "very prejudicial to the said Parke" and should be pulled down, thus no price was fixed to them.

The King, just before the Civil War, had granted to the Earl of Dorset all the underwood and coppices of the forest, together with the Chamberlain's house and grounds, the fish ponds, forges, furnaces and workers' cottages; but all marked oaks were exempt. together with mature beeches, ash, elms, chestnuts and crab apple trees. The King also retained for his own purposes "twelve of the fairest young trees of oake, elm or beech upon every acre", adequate browse for the deer, and windfall wood to satisfy the needs of keepers and tenants. The Commissioners considered the grants to the Earl, "if ever authenticke" to be void, since he had not kept his part of the bargain. Woods had been destroyed, encroachments encouraged and fencing neglected.

B2026
HARTFIELD 2 1/2
EDENBRIDGE 10
LONDON 36 1/2

B2026
DUDDLESWELL 2 1/2
MARESFIELD 5
UCKFIELD 7 1/2

COLEMANS HATCH
FOREST ROW





It was recorded that "before the late troubles", the keepers had each been given a yearly fee of £6 13 4d., and they had been allowed to "agist" or lease grazing for a hundred cattle and twenty horses for their own benefit. They had also been granted a special allowance of hay in winter for the deer, a curious custom since the twentieth century herds of deer on Ashdown Forest are most reluctant to eat hay once it has become wet, and the fallow deer of Parham Park, in West Sussex, will only sample hay that is of the highest quality, and then only when they are really hungry.

The keepers, according to the Commissioners, did not always keep to their agreement, accepting without proper authority excessive numbers of grazing farm stock. Estimates of the numbers of cattle and deer on Ashdown Forest through the centuries must be treated with considerable caution, for some of the published figures are plainly absurd. Yet it is evident that the area at most periods of history has been heavily over-grazed and over-burnt, with serious results on the biological capital of the land. The processes of erosion and dwindling fertility, which must have started with the removal of the forest cover in the 11th century, has continued ever since; and the digging of turf and peat, like the mining of stone and sand, did nothing to improve matters. These facts partly account for the poor quality of much of the stock which grazed these acres at the time, though many Commoners seem to have made liberal use of their claims on the three marl pits belonging to the Manor of Duddleswell. Some local enclosures were only worth 2d an acre, or 6d an acre for the better land.

The Commissioners advised the marling and ploughing of Come Deane Walk and other sections of the forest as a step to improving its fertility. The best way of improving Prestridge Bank, near Wych Cross, however, was "by preserving the greater part of it for wood, it having much small and young wood allready growing thereon; we conceive some part of it may be converted into tillage or pasture ground, but then the manuring must be by lime, there being noe marle neere the premisses that we know of. The remainder may be employed for breeding of young cattle".

It seems astonishing that barely six years later, yet another Commission was appointed to enquire into the condition of the area, though the cost to the Exchequer was £250—£50 to each surveyor, handed out by John Marsh—and their findings largely repeat those of the earlier report. There are a few differences. Timber in the forest, valued at £620 six years earlier, had declined to £414. The Old Lodge and its grounds, valued in 1650 at £6 was now reduced to £2 owing to one Henry Ford who had intruded into the house, suffering it "to goe much to decay", destroying the fences and fruit trees and killing off the "coneyes". Again, the wild "coneyes" of

Warren Lodge, worth £35 in the earlier survey, had dispersed or been destroyed, the palings had been removed, and the property's value had dropped to £21 4s.

With the Restoration of Charles II, were the findings of these most comprehensive reports forgotten? We know only that in 1661, George, Earl of Bristol, presumably with the connivance of the Earl of Dorset, was granted Lancaster Great Park for 99 years at a rent of £200 a year, with leave to disafforest it. Work soon began on the erection of fences, the digging of ditches and the clearance of scrub, and "several sorts of corn" were sown on land put under the plough for the first time.

We can well imagine how the local inhabitants regarded these events. Men who had long grazed their beasts on the open heathland and who saw rights that had been their forebears overruled did not sit quiet for long. Taking the law into their own hands, they threw down the fences, trampled on the newly planted hedges, filled in the ditches and put their cattle out to graze on the traditional "open" lands.

The corn failed to thrive, the restored fences were broken down again. The "improvers" fell behind with the rent, having been "frustrated by the crossness of the neighbourhood", to quote a document now lodged in the Public Record Office.

But if the Earl of Bristol could not cope with the problems, there were others who might do so. The King rewarded four followers with grants of forest land, with the same sequence of events. There is no need here to trace the tedious series of bitter disputes which marked these years after the Restoration when the forest as we know it today might have vanished if it had not been for the stubborn resistance of the Commoners.

Yet there are two sides to every question and it is not hard to picture the lively meetings between opponents and supporters of the "improvers". Would not the Commoners be better off if the land were farmed with more efficiency? Or would improvements to the land and the quality of any crops mean higher rents all round? Might not enclosure result in well-made roads and more permanent employment? Would not the 'deserving poor' really fare much better if the improvers had their way? Or were the new owners acquisitive land speculators who were robbing the poor of rights that had been theirs for centuries?

Eventually the quarrels culminated in the great lawsuit of 1689 between the Earl of Dorset and his Lessees against John Newnham and other Commoners. The Plaintiffs pleaded that they might be "quieted in the enjoyment of their lands", improving it without hindrance from the Commoners whose rights should be limited to certain portions of the forest. Commoners grazed their stock on the heathland, it was argued, only on sufferance, or as recompense for services rendered,

or as compensation for damage done to crops on their own holdings by marauding deer. Now that most of these animals had been destroyed, “the same ought to cease”, like other “pretended claims”.

John Newnham, who held fifty acres of land at Nutley Inn and other land elsewhere, pleaded—like his son and 51 others—that their claims to pasture and fuel were theirs by right and not a reward for services rendered or compensation offered for damage inflicted by deer. The rights had been associated with their farmsteads “time out of mind”.

After the Chancellor of the Duchy Court, with the Lord Chief Justice and a Baron of the Court of Exchequer had heard Counsel for the two parties, the Court accepted the view that sufficient common had been left unenclosed, and proposed that a Commission “indifferently named on both sides” should lay out the areas of land to be held “in common”, reporting back to the Court before the end of the next Trinity Term. The Court also decided that rights of estovers possessed by the Commoners were confined to birch, willow and alder. The Plaintiffs were therefore free to fell any other timber.

In due course the Commissioners reported back. Some 6,400 acres in the vicinity of the villages and farms would provide adequate pasture and herbage for the Commoners, and these areas were clearly outlined. The remainder of the 13,991 acres of forest were allotted to the Plaintiffs for inclosures and improvements. The Commoners were to be excluded for evermore from common pasturage, pannage or herbage on this ground. But it was stressed that on the open heathland, the Commoners possessed sole right to pasturage, which meant that even the owners of the soil were not permitted to graze stock there, though it was later to be confirmed that the Lord of the Manor could cut litter for himself.

The Court accepted these findings, which were outlined in a Decree of 1693. It must have seemed to many people in the district that issues that had clouded their lives through many decades were settled for ever.

They were not to know that within a few generations, their descendants were to become embroiled in the same old arguments, and that these were to result in more long and acrimonious lawsuits.

VI

THE SILENT YEARS

IN medieval times, as we have seen, Lancaster Great Park extended far to the east and south. Now, with the inclosure of roughly half the 13,991 acres, the term "forest" came to signify those ten square miles of open heathland whose natural produce was claimed by the Commoners; and it is generally in this sense that the word is used in the remaining chapters of this book. Confusion about the matter in our own day is not unusual, for when people speak of Ashdown Forest, they may mean either a whole district of heaths and woodland that includes many private estates to which there is no public access, or they may be talking of the 6,400 acres where the public are free to roam.

Little has been recorded of the decades that followed the settlement, a sign that the solution pronounced by the Duchy Court proved generally acceptable to all parties. We know that in 1727 all trees containing more than four feet of timber, or of a girth exceeding six inches, were sold for £350. But it is typical of the enlightened attitudes prevailing at the time that trees planted for ornamental purposes or forming outstanding landmarks were spared; nor were trees whose shade was valued by farm stock removed. In the same year there was a sale of pollarded beech and much holly and whitebeam underwood.

In 1793 detachments of twelve regiments of the British Army established a camp on the forest between Duddleswell and the Nutley Marlpits. They included men of the East Middlesex, North Devon, North Hampshire, Sussex, Dorset, West Suffolk, East Norfolk, Berkshire, West Essex, Oxford, South Devon and Westminster Middlesex regiments. A plan in the Public Record Office (MPH 407) shows that the camp beside the Duddleswell-Nutley road, and extending for roughly half a mile north-east of Duddleswell, coincides with a series of "mystery mounds" that long ago puzzled archaeologists, though Mr. I. D. Margary has lately established that they formed the sites of military field kitchens.* The camp, no doubt, was a source of much curiosity and excitement in the neighbourhood.

The scarcity of detailed records of this period does not necessarily imply that the district was free from problems. "Poaching and smuggling have from time immemorial been foremost among the besetting sins of the foresters", wrote the

*See *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, Vol. CIII, 1965

Rev. Edward Turner, and he remarks that the small woodland village of Copthorne, near East Grinstead, became so notorious a place of rendezvous for smugglers and horse-thieves that a parish horn was acquired with which to summon aid when violence occurred. Writing in 1862, he hastened to add that the Copthorne horn was no longer heard now that there was both a policeman "and a better system of morality" among the Copthorners. Poaching, however, had lost none of its popularity in the neighbourhood.

This was not surprising. Once a man has grown adept at using the long net in the silent hours of the night, lying in wait for the rabbits, the odd hare or the startled doe to come bounding out of the darkness in blind terror of men cautiously driving them forward, it is never easy to exchange the poachers' craft for more respectable excitements. It must be admitted, too, that when a bad harvest made money scarce, a young family might occasionally go hungry to bed. Hence the habit of the village poacher in going out on moonlight nights in the hope of "bagging" a free meal. This involved a close knowledge of the locality and of the ways of wild creatures. It was often vital, too, to keep within the shadows by seldom treading far from cover.

The poacher might stay in bed in a hard frost, for then the sound of footsteps may reach the sensitive ears of rabbits, hares and deer hundreds of yards away. When clouds darkened the skies and rising temperatures softened the light Ashdown sands, he would be out again; and on nights when the moon disappeared behind low cloud and it became unnecessary to keep under dense cover, a man who ventured out on to the open heath could find plenty of blackcock roosting amid the heather and the dwindling stock of cranberries.

Smuggling was more profitable. Now it was not guns but spirits, tobacco, lace and other goods that offered the best rewards. It is all too easy for later generations to sentimentalise the smugglers, and there are old drains in the district that have never carried anything stronger than rain-water, but which have been promoted with the years into "secret passages" where smugglers are said to have hoarded their illicit kegs of brandy.

Yet not all these tales are false. Beggars' Bush, Duddleswell, with its clump of hollies, was once a favoured haunt of smugglers who are said to have unloaded their goods beneath the ancient oaks and beeches that offered useful hiding places. Then the contents of the secret cache might be dispersed via the ancient pack-horse trails winding over Camp Hill and King's Standing.

Many of these hollow ways, which were in regular use well into the eighteenth century, can be clearly traced across long stretches of the forest. Where the ground became too heavy with mud, travellers would seek a drier route alongside the original track. The result is that the busiest routes, heavily churned up by the

horses hooves—and that from Wych Cross to Chelwood Gate is an example—might be broadened with the years until they comprised as many as 20 parallel paths.

Indeed, Mr. I. D. Margary has recorded no fewer than twenty-four tracks on the route running south-west from Coleman's Hatch to the Hollies. Sixteen can be seen along the packhorse trail from Camp Hill to Nutley, and ten tracks have been worn between King's Standing and Crow's Nest, and on the trail from Wych Cross to Birch Grove (Cowler's Gate).

Most users of these hollow ways, no doubt, were engaged on legitimate business. Smuggling, however, was a most lucrative occupation for many persons until early in the 19th century. In 1721 it became so bad that the civil authorities in Sussex sought the aid of the Dragoons to deal with "the insolent Mayfield Gang" whose headquarters were at Horsham. While the Customs Officers claimed that year to have seized 54,000 lbs. of tea and 123,000 gallons of brandy, they complained that the gangs had "increased to such numbers and armed themselves in such a manner that not only the officers of the Customs but the Sheriffs and other civil officers are deterred from doing their duty".

The sequel was the departure for Sussex of 77 Dragoons and 36 foot soldiers who soon made themselves known in more than forty towns and villages in the county. There is reason to suspect that the villagers around the forest were by no means impressed by this display of power. They likened the exercise to setting a herd of elephants to catch eels.

There seems to have been much excitement in East Grinstead when members of the more notorious gangs appeared in dock at the Assizes. In 1750, six smugglers there were sentenced to death, the executions being carried out on Horsham Common and on Slindon Common. On the orders of the Duke of Richmond, the sum of £1 8s. 0d was paid to the soldiers who guarded them at East Grinstead.

Newspapers of the day contain frequent references to goods captured from the smugglers and offered for sale by auction at Shoreham, Newhaven and other coastal towns and villages. In 1777, 24,000 gallons of spirits, 80 lbs. of tea and much chocolate, ribbons, lace, muslin, calico, fans, earthenware and pistols were seized and disposed of in this way.

Many of the gangs were extremely brutal, as four Dragoons found when they were set upon and beaten while crossing Staplefield Common, west of the forest. In 1783 villagers dwelling around the forest saw a packhorse team laden with smuggled goods and protected by no fewer than eighteen blue-jackets, all mounted and heavily armed. Later that October evening they were observed returning to their ship via the village of Buxted. They paused to enquire of the whereabouts of "the Walter's Gang"—Walter being the Revenue Officer, operating from Horsham, who trained his own troop of excisemen to fight the smugglers.

This was an age when men delighted in impressive uniforms. The High Sheriff, as recorded below seldom went out except in full regalia; the royal rat-catchers wore a uniform of scarlet and gold, and Walter dressed his small militia in a uniform of blue and silver, with round laced hats. The blue-jackets protecting the gang of smugglers were no less striking, with their black cockades, and a carbine and pistol to each man. A Buxted villager asked this hard swearing gang where they had been and he is said to have received the reply: "Where the hell do you think? We've seen our convoy safe to Ashdown Forest".

Some of the gangs were large. Five years earlier, in 1778, a company of smugglers said to number 191 rode through Henfield in the early hours of the morning.*

Towards the end of the century, just when it began to look as if Walter and his men might triumph in the war on lawlessness, surprisingly few arrests seem to have been made. Now the struggle against the smugglers was hardly less profitable than smuggling itself and Walter, according to some writers, earned no less than £5,000 a year, a vast sum in those days. The old rabbit-catchers on the forest used to say that it would have been foolish to destroy all the rabbits, even if that had been possible, for there would have been "nowt for us to do" in the future. Did Walter and his lieutenants likewise feel that the complete suppression of smuggling could only reduce their own income?

Or was there never much chance of total victory? A gang who knew the country well and who were in league with the local inhabitants could easily bring their goods from the coast into the heart of the forest, perhaps following the old packhorse trails from Footbridge Gate to Hindleap or Kidbrooke Gate, and then on to London; or they might travel north-eastwards from Fair Place Gate, Nutley, passing north of Old Lodge and leaving the forest near Crowborough Common or Friar's Gate.

Yet the forces of the Crown had many successes. In 1781 Walter confiscated 125 bags of tea from smugglers west of the forest in the Worth area. The month of July yielded 30 bags of tea from smugglers riding through Ditchling, and two years later we find him claiming eight horses heavily laden with tea as they came through Handcross. A bigger haul came his way in October, when 95 horses bearing 39 ankers of Brandy as well as other goods were seized near East Grinstead.

One of the most notorious smugglers at the beginning of the 19th century was a native of the forest, Jack Akehurst, who grew up in Copthorne. He was in league with the Horsham attorney, "Old Sonny" Elliott, whose house in the Carfax often contained two-gallon casks of spirits that were hidden among the hay and straw in the stables. One observer reported finding 25 of these smuggled casks on the property.

*See William Albury's "Sussex Smugglers and Smuggling," *Sussex County Magazine*, 1934.

Both Copthorne and Hartfield seem to have been local centres of the smuggling trade, if we may call it that; and the fact is recalled in the name "Smugglers" Lane in Hartfield. Then gradually the forces of law and order proved more effective, and early in the 19th century we begin to find far fewer accounts in the Sussex newspapers of the escapades of the smugglers and their trials at the local Assizes.

This trend did not please everyone. A report on the "Disturbed Districts of Sussex" issued in 1833 records: "Since the establishment of the Preventive Service, smuggling is much diminished. This diminution has had the effect of increasing the Poor Rate . . . Those who do not directly profit by smuggling consider that it is advantageous as finding employment for many who otherwise would be thrown upon their parish".

Smuggling and poaching were not the only illegal activities that occurred during nights when the moon was shining. There are a number of properties around the forest that owe their extent to the method of "grab inclosure". A family, under cover of darkness, might remove a stack of hay or faggots on to the adjoining heath, erect a fence or dig a ditch around it, and by the morning they would claim it as their own. A small fee would be paid to the Lord of the Manor at the next Court Baron to mark that the ground in question had been "sot in" or "set in".

Occasionally, as when a General Election was approaching, the Lord of the Manor might actively aid the process. "His Lordship's Steward happened to come by and he had a long talk with me", an old Commoner told a local Rector, late in the last century. "'How handy that bit of common lies to your orchard', says he. 'Looks almost to belong to it. If I was you', says he, 'I'd just take that bit in and put the fence on t'other side. Nobody would object'. Then as he turns to go away, he said 'Mind you vote straight, and get as many votes as you can'".

He was hardly out of sight when the Commoner and his brothers began to tear down the hedge. "We worked all day and most of the night and next day, and then you'd have thought that bit had been taken in for a twelfth month". Soon afterwards the new owner sold some stock and used a portion of the profit to confirm the inclosure at the next meeting of the Manorial Court. "I've a parcel of land I want sot in", the Commoner explained, throwing down a handful of silver, which the Steward accepted. (The Rev. C. N. Sutton, 1902).

Small additions of this kind might mean space for a few extra fruit trees or a hundredweight or two of hay. This could be a useful gain for a forester who well knew the meaning of poverty. Many cottagers kept a mare or pony and supplemented their income selling faggots, transporting materials for the small village builders, or doing odd jobs for the gentry. Late in the summer there was always money to be earned in the hop fields of the district; and after satisfying their own

needs for litter, they might help the larger farmers with their cutting of bracken on the forest.

Yet at the back of their minds there often lay a deep-rooted fear that hard times might bring them to end their days in the Hartfield Workhouse. The Rules in 1821 declared: "It is required that every poor person who is supported in this House, either man, woman or child, shall attend Divine Service every Sunday morning and afternoon and on all Prayer Days throughout the year, by order of the Governor or Governess. All those that neglect Morning Service shall have no Dinner. Those that neglect the Afternoon Service shall have no Supper". When people first applied for poor relief, they were usually told to go out on to the forest with a wheelbarrow and bring back a load of stones, a custom that must have accelerated the growth of gully erosion.

There is not much evidence that the farmers and Commoners living around the forest encouraged the education of even the "deserving" poor. Perhaps it would be fair to suggest that until recent decades, many country people did not really approve of education. But as long ago as 1837, one Charles Hoare, at the Thatched Cottage on the forest, organised a school for 31 children. A Crowborough housewife instructed 14 youngsters in the three "R's", and it was said that "she also taught them to work". It is curious that a Mrs. Brown, who kept a school at Friar's Gate, charged 2d a week for girls, but only 1½d for boys.

Absenteeism was frequently high, especially when there was hay-making, harvesting or bracken-cutting on the forest. Brake fern or bracken was cut with the "swop" or sickle while still green; litter was the term used for all the vegetation that fell to the scythe, mainly bracken, heather, furze or gorse, broom and coarse grass. It was cut later in the autumn when the heathland had turned a rich russet shade just before the first frosts. The local farmers valued it as a cheap and effective substitute for the more expensive straw, and it was put down in the farmyards and well-trodden by the cattle before being put out on the fields with the manure. Some farmers found it a useful covering for clamps of swedes or turnips and other roots.

The first Earl of Sheffield, John Baker Holroyd, whose farm was generally judged a model estate, found it worth while to send teams of oxen on to the forest to fetch forty or fifty wagon loads a year. His oxen were lighter and less slow in their movements than most Sussex oxen, and he found it profitable to dispense with all but a couple of heavy horses and to employ 18 oxen to do almost all the ploughing and carting on the farm. Whereas several farmers sent teams of eight oxen to collect litter from the forest, Lord Sheffield's carters found that a team of four of his strong, well-bred beasts were adequate.

Many of the people of Fairwarp, Nutley and neighbouring villages claimed to know every team on sight. They were well acquainted, too, with the grazing cattle, for all were marked and most people recognised at a glance who owned which stock. If a beast waded too deep into a bog, or lost itself in one of the eight marl pits of the area, there were always friendly neighbours who would let the owner know and help him to rescue the bewildered beast. A familiar figure on the forest in the first years of the last century was "young John Combridge" who used to ride after the cattle on a little black pony that was far too small for him, and years after his death men still remembered him as "a good neighbour" who was intimately acquainted with all the herds.

Many of the men who wielded scythes hour after hour in the hot autumn sun or the blustering winds possessed good old Sussex names that occur again and again in local records—Coppards and Heasmans, Jenners and Beards, Osbornes and Miles, Newnhams and Paynes. At one time, every street in East Grinstead is said to have had a Payne living in it. One member of the family, who was High Sheriff of Sussex in 1768, never went to church or to any public meeting or even to market without wearing his full dress, including cocked hat, kid gloves and a pair of pistols at his side. The dignity of his office demanded it, he insisted.

We can learn much about this period from old farm account books. Those of the Maskells estate record:

"1795. Old Heasman 13 days of cutting and loading litter	..	£1	5	0
Allowed the furze-cutter to drink,			2	6
July 16. Pd. Edward Heasman for digging one load of peat,	..		5	0
November 7, Heasman for cutting 14 loads of litter,		£5	5	0
Pd. Shaw's boy, 6 days			4	0

It is strange that between 1815 and 1834, litter—at half a guinea a load—is always spelt "leeter" in these account books, whatever the handwriting.

In 1816, a meeting of Commoners was held at Nutley, when it was decided to mark certain stretches of ground, known as reservations, with wooden posts ten yards apart. It was agreed that no litter would be cut within these small areas. Presumably, the aim was to create refuges for blackcock and pheasants, and also to protect young trees that were the property of the Lord of the Manor. The five reservations were at King's Standing, Gill's Lap, Five Hundred Acres, the Crow's Nest and Hollies Down, near Broadstone.

At this time, and well into the middle of the nineteenth century, most people living around the forest burnt peat dug from the heathland. Not all those who carted it away, or who put their cattle out to graze could honestly claim to be Commoners, and Lord Cavendish, at Walkhill, and Lord Biddulph, at Brambletye, were only two of a number of local residents who became perturbed at the way the

forest was being misused. The sequel was the calling of a public meeting, on May 5, 1830, at the Maiden's Head Inn, Uckfield.

An eye-witness many years later described how "Old Lady Shelley, (now dead) was handed into the chair by Sir Thomas Wilson and either Lord Sheffield or Mr. Streatfield. They led her up the stairs where there was a good deal of merriment over it, in which she joined. Young George, Earl De La Warr, was present and sat by her right side at the corner of the table and I think Lord Sheffield supported her on the other side. I also remember that there were present Lord Liverpool (of Buxted Park), Mr. George Hoper, who was Lord De La Warr's solicitor, and Edward Verrall was Clerk to the meeting".

Resolutions were passed defining the rights of the Lord of the Manor and the Commoners in the light of the Decree of 1693, and a Committee was appointed to ensure that the area was properly managed. "I was appointed Looker-over-the Forest", reported Robert Edwards, of Five Hundred Acre Wood, most of whose 25 years had been spent on the Buckhurst estate. "There were four other Lookers appointed, each in charge of a section of forest. My district extended from Gill's Lap in the parish of Withyham to the part of the forest near the Twyford estate. If we found anyone cutting without leave, we served them with a notice and occasionally, if they did not desist, proceedings were taken against them".

Two men named Scott and Friend persisted in cutting litter without authority near Nutley. Eventually, "Mantell, the Sheriff's officer at Lewes, and an assistant came over. John Adams, another Looker and I met them and pointed out the two men, who were then carried straight away to Horsham Gaol, where they were confined for some time. They were finally let out on an undertaking not to cut any more litter. This checked illegal cutting for a time".

Disturbed at the increasing damage done by the indiscriminate digging of peat and turf, the Committee decided to earmark certain sections of heath where it might be removed by authorised persons. The local poor were told that they could help themselves to a fair portion of peat—not more than two wagon loads a year—on obtaining a ticket that had to be signed by three members of the Committee. These arrangements were abandoned later in the century and in 1885, the removal of turf and peat even by Commoners became illegal.

The whole family down to the youngest infants might help with routine jobs on the forest. When Benjamin Bridger, of Yew Tree Farm, Coleman's Hatch, went out on to the forest at the age of six in the year of Waterloo, and cut bracken with a "hook", he was probably only doing what successive generations of youngsters had done since before the Conquest. Cutting litter, on the other hand, was a man's job, to quote his own words. The younger children were often to be found turning it for drying or leading in the wagons.

Martha Langridge, born at Fletching in 1810, whose father was to become the blacksmith at Hartfield, described in later life how she would go to work on the forest accompanied by a small sister. One day they took the baby in its cradle and "upset it between us. My father was one who hit before he barked, and he gave us a good hiding. We cut brakes for our hogs. One day I fell in the bog at Newbridge, where much peat was cut. I was a dreadful mess and my father boxed my ears".

Farmers who collected more litter than they could store would pile it on the roadside verges where it frequently aroused complaints from people living in the neighbourhood, for it was sometimes blown or washed into the lanes. Some commoners cut more than they needed for their own use and sold the surplus. Bushes, too, were often cut down and used to block gaps in the hedges, in accordance with the medieval right of frith and tennet.

The old custom of putting out hay for the deer in winter and claiming in return a couple of pollarded beeches had long ago lapsed. But late into the 19th century, there were Commoners who recalled that a Duddleswell farmer named Trunk was the last man to maintain the practice. A fallow doe, inadvertently killed near Gill's Lap by the Hartfield Harriers in 1808 or thereabouts, has often been described as the last wild deer in Ashdown Forest, though there is evidence that another doe was killed at the foot of Kid's Hill in 1820. No more deer were seen in the district, except in parks, before 1860, and the *Victoria County History of Sussex*, in 1907, mourns the wild deer, like the blackcock, as "things of the past", though attention is drawn to the 600 red and fallow deer amid the 2,000 acres of Buckhurst Park and the 250 fallow deer in Buxted Park.

It was still the custom not to turn sheep out on to the forest, though a Commoner named James Baker risked the wrath of his neighbours by grazing a few sheep there for a time. Goats and geese have never been commonable in a forest, and horses, too, were generally kept off the heath during the first half of the nineteenth century. Any horses which did wander there were liable to be taken to the pound at Nutley.

The travelling charcoal-burners made good use of the alder-buckthorn, and gypsies, with their colourful ledge and Reading wagons, were always eager to help themselves to firewood. They also gathered many wild plants for medical purposes. Juice from the berries of honeysuckle was valued as a cure for sore throats. The young shoots of broom were thought to be a useful antedote to kidney complaints, and bogbean, regarded in many districts as a purifier of the blood, was welcomed locally as a preventive of rheumatism. "My Grandad always kept quantities of it in the house", a farmer's wife told me, "and he gathered it by the bucketful from the forest and from Chailey Common". This fact may help to explain why the species

has now dwindled so much, for it can be found on only three sites in Ashdown Forest.

When a correspondent of the *Spectator* visited the region in 1879, he found a wide tract of heathland with hardly a bush to be seen above the level of the heather and bracken. He admired the “long ridges of heather, brushed by the sea breezes”, and the numerous moorland streams cutting between steep banks “in which the yellow sandstone with its iron veining forms a delightful background to fern and moss and creeping plant”.

Beech and oak occasionally dotted some stretches of the heath. “That most lovely of young trees, the silver birch, rises here and there in quaint groupings, while holly and the yew sometimes break the surface of the open heath”. Weathering had toned down the harshness in the stone and brick work of the squatters’ cottages, and the bright red of their Sussex tiles harmonised well with the landscape.

Various efforts had been made, the writer reported, to plant the heath with trees, but these attempts had been “wisely resisted by the Commoners”. Not that they were unreasonable. Clumps of Scots pine planted for ornament and not for profit were not harmed by them,* nor did they meddle with those knolls of beech or pine that imparted “an indescribable sense of solitude” to certain of the long heathland ridges. The wooden posts erected around five reservations in 1816 had long ago decayed and litter-cutting had been resumed within these plots. But now, the Lord of the Manor had succeeded in establishing Scots pines on a number of the landmarks, and the *Spectator’s* correspondent warned that the species might soon become dominant through natural regeneration on a large area of open heath.

Five years earlier, yet another attempt had been made to re-establish the old Association of Commoners. A letter, dated August 18, 1874, written by Earl De La Warr’s solicitors, and read at the first public meeting of the revived Association, stated: “The Association has his Lordship’s moral support, but as he is not interested in the herbage, you will not of course expect him to contribute towards the expenses”.

Not all members of the Association were entirely dependent upon farming for their income. Many local housewives were highly skilled craftswomen, producing broadcloth and making clothing for residents of the neighbourhood. You could not walk through Hartfield and other forest villages on a fine summer’s day without hearing the hum of sewing machines emerging from open cottage doorways. The

*Mr. I. D. Margary has kindly pointed out to me that the *Spectator’s* correspondent was quite wrong here. Many Commoners were indignant about “these ugly clumps frowning down on us,” and some trees were destroyed.

village high street then was not primarily a means by which strangers could travel at speed to the coast; it was chiefly a place where people could enjoy a friendly gossip. There was always much to talk about, for the country year was marked by many small excitements, including frequent village fairs, some of them of remote origin; there were constant church and chapel functions; and both cricket and its ancestor, stoolball, were popular in the district, though the latter game did not enjoy a big revival until the first World War.

On the birthdays of the Earl and Countess De La Warr, a salute was always fired across the lake in Buckhurst Park by their private battery of fourteen guns. Only seven of the guns were fired when the children had a birthday, except in the case of the eldest son, Lord Buckhurst, in whose honour the full battery of 14 cannon would blaze across the water. The De La Warr children enjoyed nothing better than to use these guns for target practice, but their shooting was not always accurate and after a shot penetrated to Hartfield High Street, the Earl intervened and the battery was silenced for ever.

More changes occurred, though they developed slowly. Some time in the middle of the last century, a Colonel Young, of Hartfield, introduced sheep on to the forest, with a shepherd to look after them, and no one seems to have objected. Several people began putting their horses out to graze. The farm bailiff at Sheffield Park admitted that though he continued to send carters up to the forest to collect litter, he did not really need it. But now that part of Chelwood Common, in the Manor of Broadstone, had been enclosed, a number of smallholdings had come into existence and he feared that "persons living upon them and having no rights" might start cutting on the forest if he did not do so! It was around this time that Mr. Bernard Hale, of Hartfield, introduced Shetland cattle into the area.

These were small changes. This was a slow world, in which almost every action was carried out by hand, and the way of life of the villagers was largely shaped by the rhythm of the seasons, and by customs that may have been old when "King John" hunted the local deer. To the people of the forest, there was no reason to suppose that the world would ever change.

Then one day in 1876, a letter went out to the Commoners from the solicitors to the 7th Earl De La Warr. It stated that as Lord of the Manor of Duddleswell and owner of the soil, their client did not accept the claims of the Commoners to cut litter on the forest and cart it away. The practice must therefore cease forthwith.

VII

A THREAT AVERTED

THERE was one Commoner to whom the warning letter came as no surprise. John Miles, a Hartfield labourer employed by Mr. Bernard Hale, had spent two days in the autumn of 1876 scything litter while his wife cut half a load of brakes. Suddenly, William Pilbeam, a keeper employed by the Lord of the Manor, arrived on the scene. "He told me I must not cut it", John Miles reported later. "I told him I would not leave off unless Mr. Hale said so. He must see Mr. Hale.

"He said I must go myself. I replied that if he would pay for my time I would go, but I should not go without, as I couldn't expect Mr. Hale to pay me for it.

"I continued to cut".

The sequel was the long drawn-out trial in the High Court of Justice when Earl De La Warr brought a test case against John Miles and his employer, Bernard Hale, Commoners, ordering them to refrain from cutting litter on any part of Ashdown Forest.

Who were these Commoners who were to defend themselves so stoutly before Vice-Chancellor Bacon? They were not all small farmers and humble labourers. Mr. Hale was Deputy-Lieutenant of Sussex, Chairman of the East Grinstead Bench of Magistrates, and of the local Board of Guardians. Other Commoners included Henry Fitzalan Howard, 15th Duke of Norfolk, and Earl Marshal of England; the third Earl of Sheffield; the third Baron Colchester; the widow of Sir John Villiers Shelley, Bart.; Sir Spencer Maryon Wilson, Bart.; and a number of men who could neither read nor write.

When the Judge enquired of the principal defendant why he thought the Lord of the Manor was bringing the action, Mr. Hale replied: "I merely regarded it as another instance of Lord De La Warr's, or his solicitor's, wish to create trouble in the neighbourhood".

The Judge did not agree, as events soon proved. The Plaintiff's case was that litter could only be taken by the mouth of cattle as a common right, and his Counsel sought to prove the point by quoting the Decree of 1693, which awarded the Commoners sole pasturage for their cattle on the forest, but which entirely failed to mention litter-cutting. Would this important statement have remained silent on the matter if the alleged right of the Commoners to cut and harvest the

heathland vegetation had really existed? By claiming a privilege that was not their's by right, the Commoners were seriously disturbing the Lord of the Manor's game. Moreover, young trees that were his property as owner of the soil were inevitably cut down during the harvesting of the litter.

Much anxiety and indignation was felt by the people of the local villages and hamlets. Since much might depend upon the length of time during which the defendants had annually cut the litter, the legal advisers to the Commoners compiled lists of those who had been involved in the practice early in the century. It is hard not to feel moved as one glances down the lists.

"John Hudson, 1839, gone to America.

Sarah Heasman, 1839, now very deaf.

Coppard (boy) He's the Policeman at East Grinstead.

James Baldwin, 1833, Gone to Australia.

William Wheatley, 1833, In the workhouse".

One can picture the excitement, the nervousness and perhaps also the sense of self-importance that may have marked those who were chosen to appear in the witness box. Among them was the former Martha Langridge, now Mrs. Baker, who seven decades earlier had dropped the baby out of its cradle and fallen into the bog near Newbridge. "She is a most intelligent old lady", wrote the solicitor, in the margin of his brief, "and she will make an excellent witness".

John Miles, who admitted in the witness box that he could not read, soon made it plain that litter-cutting was no light job. The grass, heather and furze was often no more than four or five inches high, for it was cut low each year. He agreed that a few seedling trees were growing up, but they were no higher than his boot, and he took immense care to avoid them. In particular, "I cut no seedling firs".

So the great debate dragged on week after week. Intense interest was aroused as judgement was delivered. "At no period of history, nor in any of the documents is to be found any trace of a claim of right by the Commoners to cut and carry away pasture in herbage or brakes, heather or litter. On the contrary, there is more than a suggestion that no such right was ever claimed or lawfully exercised". Accordingly, judgement was pronounced in favour of the Lord of the Manor.

It was a severe blow to the Cottagers living around the forest, but an Appeal was lodged and the case was heard by Lord Justices James, Brett and Cotton in 1881. The Court of Appeal accepted the original judgement that the words "sole Common pasturage and herbage" in the Decree of 1693 only entitled the Commoners to take by the mouth or bite of their cattle, and not to cut or carry away any part of the natural produce of the soil; and the three Judges agreed that the Defendants had failed to prove that any special custom existed in 1693 entitling them to cut on the common. But reversing the earlier Judgement, they accepted

that Hale had proved that he and his predecessors in title had taken as of right brakes, fern, heather and litter for use on his tenement for upwards of 60 years.

Meantime Counsel had advised the Commoners' Association that judgement in favour of Hale and Miles would not adequately defend their fellow Commoners, and a cross action was undertaken at the Commoners' expense against the Lord of the Manor. The Plaintiffs in this instance were Bernard Hale, Sir Percy Maryon Wilson and Robert Melville, and their solicitors were the London firm who had lately brought the famous Epping Forest case to a successful conclusion on behalf of the Corporation of the City of London. They pleaded for an injunction restraining Earl De La Warr from interfering with the rights of the Commoners by promoting the improvement of the Common pasture, by developing stone and gravel quarries, planting larches and Scots pines, and encouraging the settlement of squatters on the forest.

After the Earl's defeat in the Court of Appeal, he came to terms and judgement by consent was reached. On March 13, 1885, a provisional order was made by the Land Commissioners for England regulating the Common under the Commons Act, 1876, and making provision for byelaws, the protection and regulation of the rights of the Commoners, the prohibition of all cutting of turf and other acts tending to damage the surface; and the prevention of the cutting of brakes, fern, heather, and litter by any person who was neither a Commoner nor a tenant of three or four farms adjoining the forest. A Board of Conservators was then formed under the Commons Land Regulation (Ashdown Forest) Provisional Order Confirmation Act, 1885.

The Act gave the Board powers to raise funds by means of a rate of sixpence per acre for each acre of land in the possession of those with rights of Common. The public were granted free right of access to a number of prominent landmarks on the forest, including Crow's Nest, Camp Hill, King's Standing, Gill's Lap, and other clumps of Scots pines—always referred to as "firs"—near Crowborough Town and Broadstone Warren. This was a most unusual provision for common land in a rural area, where the public generally have no legal right of access on heathland outside the areas administered by urban district councils.

Byelaws were introduced which made it illegal, among other things, to use blasphemous or obscene language on any part of the forest, or to light a fire without authority. Four inclosures were authorised for cricket grounds in the main villages of the area, and all who could establish that they had owned land on the forest before December 9, 1869, however acquired, were authorised to retain it free of expense. Those who had inclosed commonland since that date were allowed to purchase it at a fair market price. It was found that one family had inclosed seventeen plots, which they were allowed to retain for £88 15s. 8d. John Bashford, of Forest Row, paid

£30 7s. 6d. for a quarry and other land, and Albert Turner, of Nutley, put down £88 3s. 9d. for a mere 1½ acres. Altogether, 156 separate inclosures were found to have been made by 104 persons, and the ground was now sold to them for £1,018 16s. 9d.

Twice in recent centuries Ashdown Forest had come perilously near to disappearing. Now it was safe for evermore. The newly-formed Board of Conservators were well aware that no easy task lay ahead. Funds for the sound management of the area were eventually to prove inadequate. Each decade was to bring a succession of fresh problems.

Fortunately, the Conservators were well served by a succession of Chairmen and Clerks who brought to their tasks an understanding of a host of complex problems that was the result of a long and intimate experience of the forest and its people of recent years. The first Chairman was Mr. H. F. Freshfield of Kidbrooke Park whose family had long owned what were thought to be the ruins of John of Gaunt's Palace. His adviser as Clerk to the Conservators was Mr. William Augustus Raper, the Battle solicitor who had so skilfully prepared the case for the defence in the recent lawsuits. Our knowledge of the forest in recent centuries is largely due to the hundreds of hours he spent examining ancient documents and interviewing older inhabitants.

Mr. G. M. Maryon-Wilson, of Searles, Fletching, succeeded Mr. A. Turner as third Chairman in 1900, and he and Raper remained in office for the next three decades. Battle lies twenty-five miles from the forest, and it is surprising that the Clerk, despite the scarcity of motor-cars and telephones in the early years of the century, succeeded so well in coping with day to day problems of administration.

The tradition of long service to the forest and its people was maintained by their successors. In 1930 Raper's duties were taken over by Mr. R. W. Fovargue, of the same firm of Battle solicitors, who remained in office for 21 years. The present Clerk to the Conservators, Mr. P. A. Williams, solicitor, of East Grinstead, succeeded him in 1951. This record of only three Clerks in 80 years is remarkable by any standards.

In the same period, there have been nine Chairmen, including Mr. S. J. Marsh, who carried out much useful historical research into the rights of Commoners, during his twelve years—1946 to 1958—in office. Mr. Jocelyn Drew brought a new approach towards controlling the Forest fires and it was during his chairmanship 1963-1967, that the firebreaks which have proved so successful were first cut.

Many of the Rangers have also retained their posts over long periods. At first the job was combined with that of Woodreeve to the Lord of the Manor. Thus, the first Rangers might find themselves supervising sales of timber and gravel for Earl De La Warr. Early in the present century they were called upon to aid several

private detectives who were employed for a time to track down malicious fire-raisers, and in 1908 they would commend to the Clerk persons claiming rewards for reporting fires. Commander Angel draws my attention to a Minute of 1907 urging the need for an additional Ranger and instructing the Clerk to approach local landowners requesting contributions towards his salary. In other words, would they become 'Friends of the Forest'.

One Ranger, Mr. H. Kirby, who was appointed two years before the first World War, still held the post when the second World War began. Between 1914-1918, he had seen the Army inflict so much damage on the forest near Crowborough that the War Department paid £1,000 damages. Now he was to watch Spitfires and Hurricanes attacking Nazi raiders over the forest.

Gilbert Day almost equalled his record for long service. He was appointed in 1938, promoted to Senior Ranger ten years later and, no doubt, he would still be in office but for the tragic accident of 1963, when a tree collapsed on him during felling operations. His death came as a profound shock to the district, for there was hardly a person in the neighbourhood who did not know him. A full list of Chairmen, Clerks and Rangers who have served the Conservators of Ashdown Forest will be found in an Appendix. It was most kindly compiled for me by Mr. P. A. Williams and Commander J. P. Angell.

There is no need at this distance of time to linger over the many small controversial issues that arose. Two large chests in the Conservators' offices at East Grinstead contain much correspondence about wayleaves, encroachments and other matters; there are reports from the Rangers—now three in number—and from an Inspector of Ashdown Forest, a post now defunct. There is also an account submitted in 1896 by a faithful "Looker". His statement reads: "For overlooking Ashdown Forest and assisting in throwing out encroachments . . ." and the amount is left blank. Below he has written: "The amount I leave entirely to the Conservators. I will be quite satisfied with any remuneration they think fair".

There were complaints about an East Grinstead resident cutting 5,000 faggots of oak, holly, maple, whitebeam and birch on land near Nutley; County Council workmen had dug stone for the roads and buried the top spit of heathland turf; and a householder living on the edge of the forest took exception to the new rate of sixpence an acre and wished to renounce her common rights. Counsel advised the Conservators that, while common rights might sometimes lapse through disuse after 30 years, the owner or tenant of a property with common rights could not abandon them in order to evade payment of rates. A Commoner was a Commoner whether he or she liked it or not.

Judge Parry was equally positive when the tenant of New Lodge Farm sued a Commoner, W. H. Cowan M.P., for damage to oats and grass done by cattle

straying off the forest. Mr. Cowan argued that if the Commoners had to keep fences of local enclosures in good repair, they would have to maintain 50 miles of them and their rights to graze cattle on the forest would be virtually useless. "I think his contention is sound", said the Judge. "The tenants of holdings cannot call upon Commoners to tend their cattle or to repair other peoples' fences, but they themselves must see that their enclosures are properly fenced against the Commoners' cattle".

In 1908, the Conservators rejected a request from the Royal English Arboricultural Society for the use of up to 500 acres as a School of Forestry. Thirteen years later they declined to lease areas of heathland to the Forestry Commission for the planting of conifers, explaining that many legal and other problems stood in the way.

New Byelaws introduced in 1935 prohibited the digging up of primroses, bluebells and other plants, the removal of heather, moss, rushes or other species; and the cutting of brakes by the Commoners between May and June, or the cutting of litter between May and August were forbidden except on areas set aside by the Conservators for the purpose. The Ashdown Forest Act, 1937, strengthened the powers of the Conservators, authorised the provision of annual grants from the local authorities mentioned in the Introduction, and gave these Councils representation on the Board.

The Ashdown Forest Act, 1949, provides for the use of the forest by the Army for military training, subject to certain restrictions that are most important. No live ammunition may be used or fires lighted; camping is prohibited and trenches may not be dug. Army vehicles are confined to certain tracks. The War Department recently informed the Conservators that they no longer wish to use their privileges granted under this Act.

By this time, the annual spate of unauthorised fires, usually between February and May, had begun to cause concern, for they imposed a heavy burden on the East Sussex Fire Brigade*—and therefore on the ratepayers—and it was evident that they were causing the bracken to spread at the expense of more attractive species. The Nature Conservancy, in 1957, called a conference of experts who agreed that while fires are an effective, although dangerous and often harmful, method of checking the spread of scrub woodland over open heathland, they rapidly reduced the variety of plant and animal species; and fires in wet heathland and bogs were particularly damaging to the scientific interest of the area. "Certain types of strictly controlled fire, at suitable intervals and seasons and on limited parts of an

*£1,698 was the cost in 1957 of fighting 400 heath fires.

area only, may be necessary in certain circumstances, but in general uncontrolled heath and common fires are an evil both to man and to nature”.

Scientists have long acknowledged that with the modern decline of grazing pressure, fire is the most important factor responsible for the survival of open heathland. It encourages the growth of young heather shoots, while a number of plant nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium may be released in the soil. There is much evidence, however, to show that these nutrients are swiftly leached from the top soil, much nitrogen may be lost in the smoke of heath fires, and gully erosion—often caused on Ashdown Forest by Army manoeuvres during the last war—is stimulated and frequently initiated by the fires, a sequel to the loss of surface vegetation.

With the destruction by the flames of surface organic matter, a serious loss of humus may occur and the soil fauna is reduced. Moreover a peaty slime tends to develop on the surface that results in increased run-off of rain-water. Sharp changes in the microclimate at ground level may adversely affect certain plant and animal communities that dislike the rapid fluctuations in temperature that now occur. It is probable, too, that the fires stimulate the germination of the seeds of silver birch, a species responsible for much drying out of wet heath and bogs of high scientific interest.

One of the most unfortunate effects of the frequent fires on the forest in recent years has been the destruction of extensive areas of attractive *Sphagnum* mosses and associated plants, and their displacement by purple moor grass, *Molinia caerulea*. Stonechats and other attractive birds have often lost their nests, eggs and young, and much butterfly larvae must have been destroyed.

It was because of mounting concern with this situation that the Board of Conservators, in 1961, agreed that the Sussex Naturalists' Trust should submit proposals for the management of the forest along lines that would meet the interests of the Lord of the Manor, the Commoners and other local residents, while conserving the rich scientific interest of the area. Many of the points stressed in this valuable document, prepared by the Trust's Scientific Officer, Mr. David Streeter, B.Sc., are discussed in the next section. Here it remains only to say that his Report did much to stimulate concern for the area, and a number of local residents, later that year, launched the Friends of Ashdown Forest.

One of the new Society's first achievements was to raise funds that enabled the Conservators to undertake the cutting of an extensive series of wide fire-breaks and these, with other measures, have already done much to prevent the extermination of rare birds and plants that were—and in some cases still are—gravely threatened by the too frequent fires.

VIII

FLOWERS OF THE FOREST

IF the Commoners who gave evidence in the great lawsuits of the last century could see Ashdown Forest today, they might be astonished by the decline of litter-cutting and the marked under-grazing of the area. Bracken is still welcomed by a number of Commoners as a cheap and effective substitute for straw, and a few gardeners value it as a compost for orchids, azaleas and rhododendrons. Two small herds of Scottish cattle thrive on the forest pasture, and there are about 600 ewes and their followers, a modest but increasing population of rabbits, and a very few hares, while 200 fallow deer, as we have seen, browse in and around the woodland.

This grazing pressure is inadequate to maintain the heathland flora by preventing invasion by birch, oak and willow scrub. Moreover, following the successful re-establishment of Scots pines on the forest during the past two centuries, there is much natural regeneration of this species, particularly where the heather, *Calluna vulgaris*, is dominant.

Thus we are faced with the paradox that while fire is often harmful to the soil and its vegetation, and to the animal life which this supports, little or no open heathland would have survived in modern times without it. No more complex problem involving the conservation of heathland exists than how to reconcile these facts.

In briefly describing the main vegetation communities of the district it is as well to remember that South country heathland, like chalk grassland, may differ much in character from place to place, much depending on man's past and present treatment of the land. Ashdown Forest contains a complex mosaic of plant communities ranging from valley bogs rich in iron and with a low calcium content to dry heath on the high, wind-swept slopes.

DRY HEATH

This community varies much according to the frequency and severity of the heath fires. Where these have been an almost annual occurrence, the heather may be retreating before the advance of bracken, though this is less noticeable on the forest than on other Sussex heaths. Where fire has been absent for some years good stands of heather survive, though it is rare in South-east England for these to complete

their life-cycle, dying off after about 18 or 20 years and a new crop growing up in the surrounding soil. Few other plants can successfully compete with the heather, partly because of the heavy shade it produces and also owing to the highly acid nature of the soil in which it thrives.

The dwarf furze, *Ulex minor*, which is absent from Ireland, the West country and the Midlands, dominates extensive stretches of dry heath on the forest, flowering brilliantly in the late summer as it does over wide areas of Northern Europe. Associated with it is the purple moor grass, *Molinia caerulea*, and it is these plants which may well displace the heather following a fire. It is in these areas that we find the uncommon Needle furze, *Genista anglica*, the attractive saw-wort, *Serratula tinctoria*, which is far from common in most areas, and the creeping willow, *Salix repens*, our only lowland willow with a creeping root stock. The parasite common dodder, *Cuscuta epithymum*, is often to be seen on the heather and gorse.

The large gorse, *Ulex europaeus*, which flowers in late winter and spring, and which is said to have brought Linnaeus to his knees in thanksgiving to God, also dominates much dry heath.

Bell heather, *Erica cinerea*, is most at home on warm southern and western slopes and it seems to tolerate a degree of dryness that would prove unfavourable to cross-leaved heath.

DAMP HEATH

The cross-leaved heath, *Erica tetralix*, with its small green leaves in whorls of four, flourishes with the purple moor grass on these acres. The petty whin or needle furze often occurs on the edge of damp heath, and it is in these areas that we find the beautiful marsh gentian, *Gentiana pneumonanthe*. It thrives more abundantly in Ashdown Forest than almost anywhere in Britain other than in the New Forest, on some of the East Anglian heaths, and in a small Wealden reserve of the Sussex Naturalists' Trust. It fluctuates surprisingly from season to season, and it may suffer severely from over-picking.

WET HEATH

Both heather and cross-leaved heath, together with deer grass, *Scirpus cespitosus*, and various sphagnum mosses, grow in these areas where the water table lies on or within a few inches of the surface. The most common species of sphagnum are *S. compactum*, and *S. tenellum*. Two species of sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*, often grow on the mosses though they will also thrive on the bare peat which in Ashdown Forest seldom penetrates more than ten inches deep. Among the rarer species of the wet heath are the bog club moss, *Lycopodium inundatum*, and the white beak sedge, *Rhynchospora alba*.

THE SPHAGNUM BOG COMPLEX

These attractive sections of the forest contain extensive colonies of the fluffy white cotton grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium*, and the beautiful bog asphodel, *Narthecium ossifragum*, and much sundew. Among many leafy liverworts is *Cephaloziella elachista* which grows nowhere else in Britain. The extremely rare bog orchid, *Hammarbya paludosa*, which is the smallest member of the family, being only two to four or five inches high, is said to grow on one site.

VALLEY MOLINIETUM

The valleys which so delighted the correspondent of the *Spectator* in 1879 formerly contained alder carr that has now been cleared, and the ground is usually dominated by the tussock form of purple moor grass. Bogbean, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, as we have noted, is now reduced to three sites in the forest, but a variety of uncommon ferns, including the mountain fern, *Thelypteris limbosperma*, flourish abundantly on the banks of some of these streams. Where open water occurs one finds the marsh violet, *Viola palustris*, on the margins of the pools. Water St. John's wort, *Hypericum elodes*, and the bog pondweed, *Potamogeton polygonifolius*, also thrive in these habitats.

WOODED STREAM VALLEYS

Through the centuries, as we saw in Chapter II, the forest streams have worn deep ghylls across the heath and some of these have never lost their natural woodland. In places the ghylls are so deep that the crowns of the tall trees growing in them are only just level with the surrounding heath. Many interesting species occur in these plant and animal refuges, including the hay-scented fern, *Dryopteris aemula*, and the two uncommon mosses dating from the "Atlantic" period already mentioned—*Diphyscium foliosum*, which succeeds in fruiting in Ashdown Forest, and *Hycomium flagellare*.

"POOR FEN"

It should be added that in acid alder and willow flushes rich in iron and lacking much calcium, many species more typical of fen vegetation are able to survive. These include the marsh willow herb, *Epilobium palustre*, the fen bedstraw, *Galium uliginosum*, and the marsh fern, *Thelypteris palustre*, in one of its last three surviving stations in Sussex.

WOODLAND

The scientific interest of the forest is much enriched by the existence of extensive woodlands around the open heath, and these enclosures contain several attractive





private lakes. In his valuable scientific report on the area, prepared on behalf of the Sussex Naturalists' Trust, Mr. David Streeter remarks that most of the woodland of the district appears to be not more than about two hundred years old, though there are some fine old beeches in Broadstone Warren. Some beech was certainly planted on the enclosures after 1693, and though the species does not normally coppice well, it was often cut when only six to ten feet high. Most of this coppiced beech seems to have been removed by the Lord of the Manor in the last century, partly because it gave rise to "too many squabbles",—presumably a result of traditional claims to pollarded beeches in exchange for certain forest services.

Today much of the best woodland lies around Kidbrooke Park and Hindleap Warren, where interesting habitats occur on both sides of the stream. It is curious, as Streeter points out, that the woodland on the eastern bank is not shown on the 1911 edition of the 6 inch Ordnance Survey Map. This stream is bordered by good alder carr, which includes some alder buckthorn, so much appreciated by the charcoal-burners, and there is evidence that the carr has never been felled.

It is beside the woodland streams that we find a small colony of the rare beech fern, *Thelypteris phegopteris*. Amid the alder carr is much woodland sphagna, the marsh pennywork, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, the lesser scullcap, *Scutellaria minor*, and the marsh violet. It is beside the damper woodland rides of the area that one may hope to stumble upon the bog pimpernel, *Anagallis tenella*, allseed, *Radiola linoides*, and the rare ivy-leaved bellflower, *Wahlenbergia hederacea*.

The illegal digging up of plants and over-picking by the public could soon threaten many of these species, and it is imperative that more should be done to arouse enlightened attitudes among visitors to the countryside. Changes in habitat as when drainage is improved or scrub is allowed to grow up, can also prove fatal to many species. A number of plants have declined in recent years, and half a dozen species have vanished from the forest. They include the lesser butterwort, bladderwort and cranberry and, more recently the dwarf under-shrub hairy greenweed, *Genista pilosa*.

The disappearance of this last species illustrates what can so easily occur. Up to 1960 quite a large colony existed on the open heathland of the forest, but a severe fire that year destroyed all but the odd specimens. In 1961 broad fire-breaks were cut around them, but in the following spring, picnickers placed an oil stove within a few feet of the plants and sat down to tea. The stove ignited the surrounding heather and in a few moments this rare plant was burnt to extinction. Today, any student who hopes to see it must travel to the Lizard Peninsula of Cornwall, to Cader Idris, St. David's Head or Snowdonia. It is always possible, however, that the odd specimen may yet occur in Ashdown Forest.

IX

BIRDS, INSECTS AND MAMMALS

BIRDS

A WALKER or rider who sets out across the forest at almost any season of the year may be struck at first by the apparent paucity of the wild life. Yet closer acquaintance with the area will soon reveal that, though the poverty of the soil and the consequent nature of the vegetation are not conducive to high animal populations, there is a sufficient diversity of habitats to ensure a variety of birds, insects, mammals and other groups that make the district one of deep interest to the naturalist.

True, much of high scientific interest has disappeared or declined in modern times. According to the Rev. Edward Turner, it was hardly possible early in the last century to walk in any direction across the open common land without causing blackcock to rise from the heather. The last individual of the native stock appears to have been shot on Chelwood Common around 1870, and later reports—the last one was in 1937—must refer to imported birds.

The recent history of other local species is no less depressing. Buzzards were abundant in Sussex up to the end of the eighteenth century, and they continued to breed in Ashdown Forest until about 1882. Three pairs nested within ten miles of the forest as recently as 1954, and these splendid birds might even now recolonise the area if only gamekeepers would leave them in peace. Small numbers of the rare Montagu's harrier formerly nested in the district and the naturalist E. G. Meade-Waldo, in 1865, had "brought to him from Ashdown Forest four nearly fledged nestlings".* Ravens bred annually on the Sheffield Park estate up to 1870-75, and twenty years ago an old Sussex countryman took me to see their nesting site. As recently as the spring of 1915, to quote John Walpole-Bond, "a man at Holtye, about four miles from East Grinstead, sent out to shoot a rook for scarecrow purposes, brought back, ye Gods, a raven".

The once common wryneck began to decline about 1920, as elsewhere in Britain, and it seems to have vanished from the area by about 1940, possibly the sequel to small, subtle climatic changes that have affected their food supplies,

*J. Walpole-Bond, *A History of Sussex Birds*, 1938.

though the matter is open to argument. Red-backed shrikes have dwindled dramatically throughout Britain within the past fifteen years, but they fared better for a time in and around Ashdown Forest than in most other districts of Sussex, though there has been no proof of breeding, so far as I am aware, during the past two or three years. Now the nightjar, too, is becoming fewer in most parts of Britain, but it has succeeded in holding its own in Sussex, and a number of pairs nest amid the bracken-infested heathland and open woodland of the forest.

Another most interesting species that becomes fewer with each decade is the Dartford warbler, a scarce resident of local open heathland, where it has long nested amid the gorse. Though much troubled in recent years by the frequent fires, this non-migratory warbler could still be found on the forest until the severe winter of 1962-63. Their staple fare probably comprised the heathland spiders, small beetles and caterpillars, including those of the small heath butterfly. Generally regarded as one of our rarest resident species, the Dartford warbler, at least in its Hampshire and Dorset strongholds, has made a fairly satisfactory recovery from the hard weather of four years ago and more than 20 pairs are known in those counties, while several pairs have lately been observed in Sussex. Thus, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the traditional Ashdown Forest haunts of the species may be recolonised.

Other more familiar small birds have fared better. Stonechats, though probably less numerous than in the early years of the century, regularly breed on the forest at the base of the gorse or sometimes low down in the heart of the *Ulex*. The last hard winter reduced their numbers in this neighbourhood by fifty per cent; and in view of increasing disturbance by visitors and their dogs, the growth of scrub and, above all, the frequent fires, prospects for a rapid recovery did not appear promising. Yet by 1964 the local population had doubled to 10 or 12 pairs, and a succession of good breeding seasons might considerably increase their numbers, if springtime fires—and excessive growth of scrub—can be controlled. Whinchats, though breeding on the forest in small numbers before the war, have always been a surprisingly uncommon summer migrant in Sussex. No breeding has been reported in the county since 1961, but odd individuals and flocks of as many as 100 birds may sometimes be seen in the migration seasons.

There is ample evidence that many of the small resident song birds have more than made good the heavy losses of the hardest winter of the century. Skylarks, meadow pipits and yellow hammers, by 1966 were back on the open heath in something like their old numbers—though this is only a personal impression. Long-tailed tits were recolonising their traditional woodland haunts, and even the tiny wren, often among the first birds to perish in a hard winter and one of the slowest to recover, was frequently reported back to something like its normal

strength, a claim that the provisional findings of the British Trust for Ornithology's Common Bird Census confirms.

It is often the astonishingly loud, spirited song of the wrens, or their raucous "tick-tick-tick" alarm call uttered from the shelter of the gorse, that are the first sounds we hear on stepping on to the open heath. Skylarks may be less abundant than when W. H. Hudson, walking on the South Downs, claimed to hear "not one nor half a dozen, nor a score or two, but many scores, and I should say hundreds of larks", but their song is a familiar sound on the forest in almost any month of the year. From February to early September, one may hear the insistent "Little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese" of the yellow hammer, which nests on or near the ground beside the gorse; and any time from April to August, the male and female linnets may be seen taking small beetles, spiders and the larvae of moths and butterflies to their families—two or three per season—housed in a rough nest of stalks, grass, moss and hair low down in the gorse. Meadow pipits, with their white outer tail feathers conspicuous in flight, commonly nest amid the tussocks of *Molinia* grass; and where there are scattered oaks or silver birches, the tree pipit, a summer migrant from tropical Africa, fractionally larger, and sleeker and stockier than the meadow pipit, can be seen fluttering down on to the heath in its strange song flight, with tail outspread and wings poised upwards.

The woodlark, distinguished from the sky lark by its shorter tail, and more pronounced buffish white eye-stripes, as well as by its voice, has probably never been numerous in Sussex. It has increased in number, however, in modern times, and scattered pairs may be heard on dry southern slopes of the forest where odd trees grow amid the small scrub and bracken. Reed buntings, with the prominent white neck-ring and black head and throat distinguishing the male, and white outer-tail feathers conspicuous on the females and young, flourish in the damper habitats, especially, perhaps, where there is running water and rank, bushy growth.

Another familiar species of the wet heath is the snipe, which sometimes nests in widely scattered pairs on marshy ground where some mud is exposed. Lapwing, though far less numerous than in the last century, continue to breed in local fields and damp heathland where the vegetation is low, and big visiting flocks from Northern Europe appear in autumn and winter. These birds have long been familiar visitors to the vicinity of the small headstreams of the Medway and when one of these water courses was dammed and converted into the Weir Wood Reservoir, south of East Grinstead, small parties of visiting ruffs and spotted redshank, odd greenshank and curlew were quick to find the acres of mud each autumn. This attractive reservoir in the valley three miles west of Wych Cross is worth visiting in the migration season, for it sometimes attracts a remarkable variety

of waders and wildfowl which can be seen without difficulty from the East Grinstead-West Hoathly road, below the impressive crag of Tunbridge Wells sand.

Not all the curlew which visit the reservoir are necessarily strangers to the district. One to three pairs have nested in the broad moorland habitats of the forest ever since 1932, and more might do so if they could escape disturbance.

Mallard and moorhens breed in and around the forest pools and lakes, such as those in Pippingford Park, indeed, mallard will nest some distance from water, the duck escorting her ducklings downhill to the nearest lake as soon as they have dried.

Perhaps half a dozen pairs of hobbies nest annually in Sussex, and several couples make their home in the scattered Scots pines of the forest. Sparrow hawks were common in the area until the late 1950s, but they had virtually disappeared by 1960, though there is much evidence of a small but significant comeback in 1966 and 1967. Kestrels, however, remain much the most common of the predators, and their hovering flight, as they seek voles, mice and beetles in the heather and grass forms a familiar sight. Their numbers annually increase in autumn when there is some migration over the district from Scandinavia. The rare hen harrier may almost be described as a regular winter visitor. In recent times one bird—possibly the same individual—has appeared over the forest during the first weeks of five successive years.

Irrupting crossbills sometimes pause for a time to breed in the pine woods of the neighbourhood, where coal tits appear to be increasing. Redstarts and wood warblers can be heard in suitable woodland habitats, and ten years ago it was possible to drive around the forest on a May evening and hear almost more nightingales than one could count. Today there seem to be fewer nightingales, but they are still common in the area, and so are such attractive singers as the blackcaps, garden warblers and chiffchaffs, and, of course, the ubiquitous willow warblers and whitethroats.

The forest is never more attractive than at twilight, when the nightjars utter their weird churring song from the top of the gorse, and odd mallard and lapwing may call excitedly in the darkening sky. It is then that we may hear another strange sound, compounded of a harsh guttural croak alternating with a light, high-pitched note. Woodcock are on the wing, parading round their territories at tree-top height in steady, purposeful flight.

Early in the last century, Charles St. John, author of *Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands* who was born at Ades, Chailey, in 1809, visited Ashdown Forest and paused to talk with a turnpike-keeper who was unusually well informed about these birds. Charles St. John, who was one of the greatest deer stalkers the Highlands have ever known, was a brilliant shot who accounted for many woodcock. (He also slaughtered most of the ospreys in Sutherland). But even he was startled by

the turnpike keeper in Ashdown Forest. "He used to kill two or three woodcock every evening for a week or two in March and April—shooting the birds while he smoked his pipe and drank his smuggled brandy and water at his turnpike-gate. This was situated in a glade in the forest where the birds were in the habit of flying during the twilight".

The turnpike-keepers, with their smuggled brandy, long ago vanished from the forest. The woodcock still fly through the dusk, uttering the strange evocative calls associated with their roding flight.

INSECTS

There is scope for much research into the fascinating and complex insect life of Ashdown Forest. Recent investigations on acid heathland in Dorset have shown how the common black ant, *Lasius niger*, dwells in wet heath dominated by purple moor grass, while its near relative, *L. alienus*, occupies the dry heath where ling, bracken and dwarf gorse thrive. It is known, too, that this dwarf furze, with its high nitrogen content, often carries a rich insect fauna, including aphids whose honey-dew attracts various species of ants. Certain spiders specialise in preying on these insects, including the ants, while the spiders in turn may be eaten by the Dartford warblers and other birds.

Many of the 36 species of British ant flourish in the forest, including *Leptothorax nylanderi*, which nests in the hummocks of the moss *Polytrichum commune*, in the sphagnum bogs. The largest species is the wood ant, *Formica rufa*, which sometimes allows members of the *Leptothorax* tribe to share its nest as guests. These wood ants favour sites containing Scots pines and other conifers, both in woodland and on the edge of the heath. Their nests are protected by a rain-proof thatch of pine needles and other debris and may be 3-4 feet high and as much as 5-6 feet or more in diameter. A single colony may contain tens of thousands of insects, including a number of Queens which may continue laying eggs for several years.

Much remains to be discovered about the role of the different ants in maintaining the heath. Recent research has shown that the distribution of hawthorn in England is largely dependent upon the movements of wintering fieldfares and redwings from Scandinavia; and in the same way the ants are probably responsible for distributing the seeds of gorse and heather along the borders of old packhorse trails and other tracks across the forest.

There is no pleasanter occupation on a late summer's day than to lie on the open forest listening to the hum of myriad insects in the heather and the murmur of the soft southern wind as it flows between the blades of grass. The swift booming

flight of a wild bumble bee and the frequent popping of exploding gorse pods may be the only other sounds.

The long-horned grasshopper, *Metrioptera brachtyptera*, flourishes in the damp heath where heather, cross-leaved heath and purple moor grass grow, and it also likes the sphagnum bogs. The small brown *Myrmeleotettix maculatus*, can be heard from late June on the dry heath, where it utters what has been described as "an urgent buzzing note". The slow, snoring sound of the larger *Chorthippus brunneus* may be heard in similar habitats later in the summer.

This book was written before E. C. M. Haes, of the Sussex Naturalists' Trust, began a survey of the dragonflies of the county. Our largest dragonfly is the Emperor, *Anax imperator*, a creature of the bigger lakes and ponds. One of the earliest species on the wing is the four-spotted *Libellula quadrimaculata*, easily recognised by the dabs of colour on the wings, which is to be seen from late May to the last days of August. The broad-bodies *L. depressa* is common near brackish water, and around running water a watch should be kept for the beautiful golden-ringed dragonfly, *Cordulegaster boltoni*, which may often be encountered around the forest from mid-June to September. It can be recognised by its large size and black and yellow banding on the abdomen.

The demoiselle agrion, *Agrion virgo*, is a most colourful creature that may be observed near shady ponds and streams between May and the end of August. The male is a brilliant blue, the female has brown wings and a green abdomen, and both sexes have bright red eyes. The large red damselfly, *Pyrrosoma nymphula*, is on the wing from May to August, especially around brackish pools, and the scarcer common blue damselfly, *Enallagma cyathigerum*, favour the small heathland pools and bogs. The largest companies of them that I have ever seen were at the Isle of Thorns, Chelwood Gate.

There is no space here, in what can only be a brief and superficial survey of the entomology of the area, to do more than to glance at a few insect groups. But a word must be said about the butterflies and moths. There are few more lovely spectacles than the sight of a newly emerged colony of small or large bordered pearl fritillaries, *Argynnis* spp., drying their wings in the sunshine on the stems of grass. The small heath, with a black spot near the tip of the brown-margined forewings, must be one of the most common species of the open forest. The small copper, orange shaded and thickly spotted with black, and with a dark margin on the forewings, can often be seen pursuing other butterflies as if in playful flight. The familiar grayling prefers to sun itself on the heather.

Ashdown Forest, like the New Forest and the heathlands of East Anglia, Dorset, the West Country and Wales, is the home of the rare silver-studded blue

butterfly,* which lays its eggs on the tips of gorse. Certain heathland ants have been known to "farm" these caterpillars, milking them for honey-dew and then safely carrying them to the right food plant. The common blue and the holly blue are also familiar inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the latter producing caterpillars which eat broom, gorse, holly and buckthorn in June and July, but their second broods subsist almost wholly on ivy and bramble. Another species that welcomes the buckthorn is the yellow brimstone, a powerful flyer that is probably the longest living of all our butterflies, emerging from hibernation in March and remaining on the wing until well into June. The green caterpillars may be found on the buckthorn and alder-buckthorn in June and July, the perfect insect emerging in August.

There are many stretches of damp heath on the forest that might well be suitable for the rare marsh fritillary butterfly, whose larvae depend upon the leaves of the devil's bit scabious, but the species is absent from the district at present, though a strong case could be made for artificially introducing it, subject to the approval of the Royal Entomological Society and the Sussex Naturalists' Trust, and with the permission of the Conservators. Other members of the Nymphalidae family include the dark green fritillary, a strong flyer whose purplish-grey-white larvae feed on the dog violet, and the handsome silver-washed fritillary, that can be seen in powerful flight around the rides and open woodland of the area during July and August, when it sometimes descends to the bramble blossom. The speckled wood is one of the most abundant species of the woodland borders.

The white admiral, with white markings on its dark wings, was almost confined half a century ago to Hampshire and West Sussex. Then it increased dramatically, possibly reaching its peak in the 1940s and '50s, when it often became a familiar sight in July on the outskirts of oakwoods rich in honeysuckle, on which its caterpillars feed. The purple emperor, with a purple gloss and white marks on the dark brown wings, formerly had its only stronghold in the New Forest; but it disappeared from that area after 1947, while becoming more numerous in West Sussex. Odd individuals may be encountered in the woods around Ashdown Forest, and it is important that ample sallow should be conserved on which the caterpillars of this impressive species can feed. This striking butterfly, oddly enough, is much attracted by the rotting remains of rats and squirrels, and foresters find that there is no better way of enticing one near than to hang up some bad meat.

The comma is another species that was formerly extremely rare, and which has greatly extended its range in recent decades. Our local commas take to the woods in autumn and hibernate on the underside of old branches, where the birds often fail to find them. They are soon on the wing again in springtime, visiting the flowers of sallow and willow.

**Plebejus argus*





During the summer the forest occasionally forms a good vantage point from which to observe the migration of butterflies. Red admirals and painted ladies fly in from the Downs on migration journeys that may have begun in southern France or even in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Some of them remain with us, the red admirals, like the peacocks and small tortoiseshells, laying their eggs on the leaves of stinging nettles, while the painted ladies lay their eggs on thistles, though burdock, mallow and nettles are occasionally used.

A word must be said about the Emperor moth, which has been described as one of the entomological features of Ashdown Forest, the Yorkshire moors and the East Anglian heaths. The male, with orange-tinted lower wings and richly varied brown and white fore-wings, can often be seen in fast, twisting flight across the open heath in April and May. The female, with handsome grey and white wings, is more inclined to fly by night. Neither of them ever feed, since they possess no tongue, and their lives are necessarily brief. No species better illustrates the curious phenomenon of "assembling", which so excited the great John Ray three centuries ago. For a freshly emerged female will attract astonishing numbers of male Emperors, though if one of them should pair with her, the others promptly disperse. The eggs are laid in clusters at the base of stems of heather, bramble, sallow and other species, and the vivid green caterpillars, with black markings and yellow or pinkish warts, may be found munching their way through the heather, bramble, sloe, sallow or purple loose-strife throughout June, July and August.

The common heath and silver Y moths occur on much of the open heath, and where the leaves of marsh gentians have attracted caterpillar predation, one may suspect the presence of the marsh plume moth which normally breeds on the broom. Many hawk moths may be encountered, the elephant hawk thriving on bedstraw and willow herb, the pine hawk probably increasing with the natural regeneration of much Scots pine, the narrow-bordered bee hawk laying its eggs on the wild scabious, while the broad-bordered bee hawk prefers the honeysuckle. In some seasons, migration may bring specimens of the death's head hawk moth and the hummingbird hawk moth to the district. The privet hawk moth is a common resident.

Entomologists will soon find that many of the ponds and marshes of the forest possess a rich insect fauna, and some of the sphagnum bogs are also noted for their uncommon spiders. Students of the pond snails, on the other hand, are likely to find little of interest owing to the high acidity of the water.

AMPHIBIANS, REPTILES AND FISH

Turning to the amphibians and reptiles, smooth and crested newts are abundant in some of the ponds, where they frequently prey on the dwindling stock of tadpoles.

The newts, in turn, are sometimes eaten by the abundant grass snakes. Adders, too, are common on some sections of the forest, thriving on the numerous common lizards and mice. But remarkably few people or dogs or even sheep are bitten, perhaps because the reptiles are so wary, being quick to seek cover when aware of the vibration of approaching feet. (Victims of a snake bite should be treated for shock). It is sometimes suggested that both the rare smooth snake and the sand lizard, of the Surrey, Dorset and Hampshire heaths, occur in Sussex, but this claim cannot be confirmed. The slow-worm—which is a legless lizard—is a common resident of local heathland and open woodland, preying upon spiders, earthworms, insects, and that enemy of gardeners, the white slug *Agriolimax agrestis*.

The forest streams are rich in brook trout, gudgeon, bullhead and minnows, and eels can be frequently encountered. Old Mrs. Martha Baker—the former Martha Langridge who as a child fell into the Newbridge bog—used to describe how she had been frightened on that occasion “by the ’efts swimming over my arm” It is sad that these bog pools are so few compared with the numbers that undoubtedly existed early in the century, and there were clearly many more of them when Martha Langridge was a child.

MAMMALS

Ashdown Forest, in the sight of most students of mammals, is primarily the haunt of a fine herd of wild fallow deer. Brief notes should be added, however, about other mammals of the district.

The hedgehog in these days often tends to be a common creature of the suburbs, and one is more likely to find an animal going the rounds of gardens on the outskirts of East Grinstead than exploring the acid heathland. While quite at home on grassy heaths in some districts, hedgehogs in this area are creatures of the open woods and scrub, the boundaries of fields and gardens. Most observers believe they are declining. Traffic takes a heavy toll. Farm and garden chemicals, including slug and earthworm killers, may have harmed their status, though little firm evidence is available. Badgers devour a few specimens, and it is no unusual experience in the Weald to find a hedgehog skin turned inside out on the boundaries of a wood. But some local residents complain that they rarely see a hedgehog, alive or dead.

Moles were originally woodland creatures that only gradually adapted themselves to a wide variety of other habitats. There is some evidence that they dislike coniferous plantations, and acid sandy heathland deficient in earthworms and other soil fauna, like the open forest, have no attractions for them. True, their diggings can sometimes be seen on the edge of certain heaths in Mid-Sussex, but this is usually where the clay comes to the surface or where pioneer silver birches have

grown up and improved the quality of the soil with an annual crop of litter, enabling the more acid-tolerant species of earthworms to colonise the ground. It should be added that a single mole working poor soil may create many mole-hills, whereas a high population of moles in good soil may produce remarkably few. They seem to have become more numerous on much local farmland since mole-catchers dwindled in number.

The common shrew is probably our most abundant mammal, and its soft twitterings can often be heard amid dense grass, bracken and small scrub on the edge of heath or woodland. The tiny pygmy shrew may be found almost anywhere where the grass or gorse provide ample cover, particularly on the margins of woods; but there is virtually no detailed information about its distribution, and though widespread, it may be far less abundant than the common shrew. Even less is known of the larger and heavier water shrew, though it appears to be a common inhabitant of the forest streams. It is always liable to occur in woodland a mile or two from the nearest water. F. J. Taylor Page, in the first *Sussex Mammal Report*, published by the Sussex Naturalists' Trust in 1967, warns that it is a species that could well suffer heavily from the contamination of the water, and also through the filling in or draining of ponds, or the deepening or clearance of drainage channels.

The identification of bats in flight is so extremely difficult—and even a bat in the hand presents difficulties to the layman—that little has been recorded about their distribution and status in the forest. The serotine and familiar little pipistrelle are widely distributed throughout the county, and the long-eared bat is an inhabitant of Hartfield and other places in the neighbourhood. A watch should now be kept for the large, greyish-brown grey long-eared bat, *Plecotus austriacus*, a species first recorded in Dorset and the Channel Islands, and confused, until 1964, with the familiar long-eared bat, *P. auritus*,

Foxes are generally abundant in the woods of the district, where they tend to lie up amid the dense brambles, emerging to feed by day or night along much frequented animal highways. These often lie alongside hedgerows and ditches and tend to avoid man-made footpaths, though that is not always true.

After myxomatosis swept through the area in 1954 and rabbits dwindled dramatically, foxes continued to fare well in this district on a diet that included large numbers of field voles—always a favourite food—and some rats, together with rather fewer woodmice, dor beetles and other insects, windfall apples, wild berries and other food. They became increasingly inclined, too, to visit suburban and village dustbins. Indeed, there was some evidence that the local fox population was larger around the suburbs of the towns and larger villages than in the deep countryside, as the Hunt discovered.

Reports of foxes hunting in packs must always be regarded with extreme suspicion! But it is certainly a fact that in the hard winter on 1962-63, foxes did congregate in some number on certain sites around the forest where food was readily available. One local farmer has long made a habit of retrieving any dead poultry from his stock and throwing the corpses out to the foxes. The very considerate Old Surrey and Burstow Hunt were requested not to molest one particular fox dwelling on this farm. Another fox in the area that was shot and carefully examined was found to have rifled one of the litter baskets provided by the Friends of Ashdown Forest. Its stomach contained a varied assortment of sweet and chocolate paper wrappings.

When rabbits declined, stoats began for a time to be seen more often in the vicinity of the forest roads, evidence that they were perhaps seeking fresh sources of food. In general they fared well enough on a diet of small mammals, together with small birds and their eggs, reptiles and possibly even fish and berries, but their numbers certainly declined, as the records of local gamekeepers proved. During the 1960s, the animals appeared to be increasing once more, and they are now fairly widespread in this county, with rabbits again their principal food. The prey is killed with a sharp bite on the back of the neck, but it is not true that they suck the blood of their victims.

Weasels are usually seen more frequently than stoats, and since voles, mice and rats form their staple diet, they never sustained the setback that stoats experienced in the 1950s. The boundaries of woodlands may form their favourite habitat, but they can be encountered almost anywhere in the district where mice and voles abound.

Now that the American mink, having escaped from local fur farms, is breeding in and around Sheffield Park and other parishes in the valley of the Ouse, the animal may well occur from time to time on the forest, though I know of no firm records. These fierce little predators, twelve to seventeen inches long and about two pounds in weight, are dark brown, with a tiny white spot on the lower lip and chin, and small white dots often scattered on the underparts. Those so far recorded on heathland have usually been hunting around ponds.

Few British mammals provide more delight to those familiar with them than the badger, which is abundant on the Ashdown and Tunbridge Wells sand. Setts, which may range in size from ten yards to as much as a hundred yards in length, tend to lie in woods and copses fairly near to water. One well-used sett on the land of an Ashdown Forest commoner is well away from woodland, but in the shadow of a hedgerow and near to ample water. Badgers are perhaps most likely to be encountered on the open forest in late summer when seeking the nests of wasps. But acid heathland, with its scarcity of earthworms—principal food of the omni-

vorous badger—and its lack of cover is not normally attractive to these animals. Badgers in a certain wood near the forest delight in Maltesers which they take from the human hand.

Otters appear to have become much more numerous in Edwardian times about the streams and private lakes of Ashdown Forest; but these fascinating and secretive animals are thought to have declined in recent years. They have many enemies. One unfortunate animal, some five years ago, was trapped in the Buxted area and sold to a zoo. In the circumstances it is wise to be discreet about the present status of otters in and around the forest. Fortunately, they are much given to wandering far afield; for while one pair may claim six miles of stream as their own, they will sometimes travel overland from one valley to another and by the time news leaks out that otters are in a particular area, they may have moved on elsewhere.

One can be a good deal more frank about the hares and rabbits. Hares have always been inclined to fluctuate widely in number for reasons not fully understood. In recent years they have been seen far more often on the edge of woodland and there is much evidence of a rise in the population in parishes south of the forest, including Fletching and Piltdown, though there were signs in 1966 and 1967 that this increase had passed its peak. A few hares may be encountered on the forest, and Hartfield used to have its own harriers which hunted the area, but the local population, at least in modern times, has been very small.

Rabbits were extremely numerous on the open forest and in the woods during the two centuries up to 1954, and they must have exercised a considerable influence in checking the growth of scrub and preventing the natural regeneration of oak, beech and other trees. They also provided many meals for the Commoners. The spread of the disease, myxomatosis, inspired a wave of anger among some local residents that was to be equalled only a dozen years later when the rabbits staged something of a comeback and began to cause damage in gardens.

Attenuated forms of myxomatosis continue to be rife in the district and many rabbits now recover from the disease, the does passing on antibodies to their offspring. If these young catch the disease at an early age, they should recover and immunity is acquired for life; otherwise they soon lose their immunity. Thus myxomatosis may continue to take an annual cull, but many of the victims would soon have been killed anyway, and a fairly substantial increase of the rabbit population must be expected around the forest. Stoats and foxes are particularly useful allies of the foresters and farmers in limiting this rise in numbers.

The Pests Act, 1954, makes it an offence to tolerate rabbits on one's property, though the Nature Conservancy preserve the right to permit them on nature reserves where special research is being carried out. The Ministry of Agriculture

(Pests Infestation Department) normally undertake the control of rabbits on common land, and the most humane method is cyanide gassing. A few Jack Russell terriers are also used by the Ministry on local heathland. Rabbit control on private enclosures is usually undertaken by the voluntary Rabbit Clearance Societies.

Turning now to rodents, the charming red squirrel unfortunately dwindled to extinction in the district during the 1940s, for reasons that remain unexplained. It is true that these animals usually decline where grey squirrels have been established for ten or twelve years; but they have also disappeared from a number of areas that have not been colonised by the larger grey squirrels.

The North American species, following a successful introduction at Benenden, Kent, in 1910, was well established throughout Sussex by 1930. It soon proved itself an enemy of the forester, stripping bark from trees in spring and summer. Like the red squirrel, it would also raid the nests of birds. Today it is most abundant in the district, though numbers will decline sharply when a shortage of forest seed coincides with a hard winter. The Forestry Commission advise that control is best concentrated in the period immediately before and when damage is done in spring and early summer.

The delightful little dormouse has probably declined around the forest in recent years, but it still occurs on the edge of woods and scrub containing hazel, honeysuckle, beech or sweet chestnut. The first *Sussex Mammal Report* records the recent discovery near Crowborough of a nest with two adults and five young.

One suspects that the little harvest mouse, a creature of the "stalk" layer, is frequently overlooked. It thrives in a variety of habitats including cornfields, hedgerows, damp heathland and marshy land; and Miss Eileen Soper in Hertfordshire, tells me of a nest she found four feet high in a gorse bush. One local gamekeeper argues that it is less plentiful in Ashdown Forest than the dormouse. Only patient research can establish the facts, and young naturalists would often be doing a useful service if they paid more attention to the neglected small mammals, insects and other groups rather than to the birds, which already have a vast following—though even with them, more workers are needed who will plot their distribution and status.

The woodmouse is a common inhabitant of woodland and hedgerows and it sometimes thrives amid the heather, though not usually where voles are abundant. The field vole flourishes best where land adjoining the open forest is enclosed for forestry plantations, for it is quick to profit from the extra growth of the grass. The beautiful bank vole, with a chestnut back and silvery-grey underparts, favours hedge banks and spinneys. The water vole is a familiar inhabitant of the forest streams, and it seems to be much more numerous than the water shrew.

Much has been written in earlier chapters about the history of the Ashdown Forest deer, and the Sussex Naturalists' Trust hope to deal with the subject in some detail in an historical survey now being prepared by F. J. Taylor Page. After 1860, and particularly during this last war, deer escaped from a number of parks in the district and succeeded in breeding in the wild. A small herd of red deer, probably descendants of the herd in Buckhurst Park, were to be seen around Pippingford Park during the 1950s; and unknown to most observers, a small herd were breeding in Five Hundred Acre Wood. Unfortunately, this herd has now dwindled to a six year old stag, a veteran hind and a single young beast, and the Secretary of the British Deer Society has expressed the view that the herd is unlikely to recover unless it is soon joined by a younger hind. But he admits that there is always a hope that this may happen, for red deer will sometimes travel long distances, and small numbers undoubtedly flourish in the Sussex woods unnoticed by most people.

The fallow deer, though frequently troubled by poaching and road casualties in recent years, were estimated to number 200 beasts in 1966, and their numbers would rapidly become far too high if the first of four Sussex Deer Control Societies had not been formed in Ashdown Forest in 1961. An annual spring census is carried out and a culling programme framed, designed to reduce damage to farms, gardens and woodlands while also improving the health of the herd. Several skilled, unpaid stalkers shoot the surplus deer with rifles, firing from high seats, thereby removing the need for the barbarous old fashioned deer drives which gravely wounded so many of these handsome creatures, and which often resulted in increased damage as terrified deer fled to neighbouring estates. The Ashdown Forest Deer Control Society, which is closely linked with the British Deer Society, has recently had to increase its annual culling programme to some extent, for disturbance of the deer through the replanting of woodland in the Wych Cross area caused some beasts to scatter. The result was that some fallow deer were even found exploring the back lanes of Forest Row and helping themselves to garden crops.

Occasional reports of roe deer in Ashdown Forest are usually received with extreme scepticism by the experts. Young roe in search of fresh territories will often wander far at certain seasons of the year and it is quite possible that odd animals have sometimes penetrated to the district, but the point has not yet been proved.

Yet it is really most surprising that these charming little deer, now so abundant in much of West Sussex and Surrey, have not successfully colonised the neighbourhood. The London-Brighton electrified railway line is usually regarded as the principal barrier, though there are bridges, and woodland above Balcombe Tunnel,

that offer a safe route. It is hard to believe that Ashdown Forest will remain without roe deer for very much longer.

If and when they do appear in some numbers, it should be stressed that the roe buck is strongly territorial, claiming possession of a section of woodland and doing his best to keep rival bucks out of the area. But if the resident buck is shot, then several competing rivals may move into the territory, a high state of tension prevails, and much damage to trees may be done by fraying, the deer expressing their irritation with each other by rubbing the trees with their antlers. It should be added that foresters in St. Leonard's Forest find the roe a useful ally in eating the brambles.

Clearly, much research needs to be carried out into the status and distribution of the mammals and other animals of the forest. It is vital, too, that in planning for the needs of tomorrow, care must be taken to ensure that future generations can still enjoy ample opportunities to see the creatures mentioned here.

A GLANCE AT THE FUTURE

THERE are ten large urban centres within a radius of 25 miles by road of the heart of Ashdown Forest and, according to the 1961 census, these places have a combined population of 564,850. It is virtually certain that these figures will increase. East Grinstead, with a population of more than 15,000, is likely to double in size by 1981. These developments can only add to the mounting pressures on the open spaces of the district.

At the moment the growing use of the forest by picnickers, walkers and riders—and anyone is free to ride a horse on the forest after obtaining a permit from the Clerk to the Conservators—appears to be causing little or no harm to the scientific interest of the area—except when careless visitors start heath fires. I must qualify that statement, however, by adding that both walkers and riders sometimes unwittingly cause disaster to the nesting curlews, and perhaps to other uncommon birds of the forest, by inadvertently driving them off the nest and enabling the carrion crows to sweep down and filch their eggs. The over-picking of rarities like the marsh gentians, or of common species such as the primrose, may also prove harmful. These points emphasise how important it is to control and channel the rising pressures in ways that cause the minimum of harm.

How can this be done? The views expressed here are my own and they do not necessarily represent those of the Friends of Ashdown Forest, still less those of the Conservators. No one, however, would surely challenge the view that since the forest through the ages has served the various needs of the Lord of the Manor, the Commoners and other local residents, while also, in recent years, offering refreshment of the mind and spirit to growing numbers of tourists from the towns, it is only right that the principle of multiple use should be the dominant factor shaping any management scheme. Nor should we forget that following the establishment of the Isle of Thorns Field Station of the University of Sussex, and the development of the work of the Field Studies Council at Juniper Hall, Surrey, and other centres, the forest has begun to play an important part in ecological education and research. As the biological sciences gain the attention they deserve in schools and universities, we can expect an enormous expansion in the demand for “open-air laboratories” of a type which Ashdown Forest supplies in such abundance.

Multiple use, it should be added, does not mean a general free for all. While no one wants a mass of fussy, irritating restrictions, the zoning in space and time of certain activities may sometimes be necessary, as with the flying of model aircraft; and some pursuits like motor-cycle "scrambling" are so out of keeping with the spirit of the forest and so damaging to the soil and its flora that a complete ban is essential. Camping, too, could add to the fire hazard.

In their report to the Duke of Edinburgh's "Countryside in 1970" Conference, Study Group 6, dealing with outdoor recreation, suggest that stretches of outstanding landscape beauty that are particularly vulnerable to damage from too many people should be regarded as "high quality environmental areas". While some portions of the forest may fall into this category, the area as a whole deserves to rank as a "General recreation area" where farming and forestry can be combined with water conservation, education and research, and with a wide range of the quieter types of recreational activity. Noisy and gregarious pastimes such as motor-cycle "scrambling" and motor-car trials are best reserved for "Intensive recreation areas" like the Lea Valley Regional Park of the Greater London Council, or similar regional parks that are likely to be established across the border in Surrey.

There is room for two opinions about the flying of powered model aircraft. Their noise is so offensive to sensitive ears that they should not be tolerated within half a mile of houses or near quiet picnic places. Moreover, the highly inflammable fuels they carry make them a considerable fire risk, and a number of heath fires in other districts appear to have been caused by them. Since these machines travel at 80 miles an hour or more, they could also constitute a danger to walkers and riders. Yet minorities, too, deserve a fair deal and a case can be argued for earmarking one or two remote sites, of little or no scientific value, which can be surrounded by ploughed fire-breaks and reserved for the flying of these machines at certain times.

It must be stressed that the legal situation concerning commonland is highly complex. Before the planting of the President Kennedy Memorial Trees—a clump of Scots pines—could take place on heathland south of Wych Cross, not only the Lord of the Manor but also the Commoners had to give their consent. This point needs to be borne in mind as we consider whether the scientific interest of the forest could not be enhanced, without harm to existing users, if two or three limited areas could be safeguarded as sanctuaries, with public access restricted during the nesting season. I am thinking, in particular, of a stretch of open moorland where the curlews nest. But even if a measure of this kind were legally possible through a Deed of Declaration issued under s.193 of the Law of Property Act 1925, it would first be necessary to secure the consent of the 1,150 Commoners, who might argue

that any "Order of Limitation" denied them their age-old right to the natural produce of the curlews' nesting grounds.

It would be quite wrong, in my view, to introduce a measure of this kind, however desirable on scientific grounds, unless it had the backing of local public opinion as expressed through the Friends of Ashdown Forest and other bodies. Yet the point should be considered, for granted a fair measure of goodwill and common-sense, it would be possible to aid the welfare of these attractive birds without seriously limiting the rights of anyone. The Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, which is valiantly fighting for "full public access to all common land", recently explained that "this does not always mean unrestricted public access".

The same controversial issues are raised by the difficult problem of fencing. No one wants to see it on Ashdown Forest, and most countrymen may well be grateful for the powerful statutory prohibitions that prevent Lords of the Manor from erecting fencing around common land. Yet as modern traffic increases, so does the toll of sheep on the roads. Commoners on parts of the Cleveland Hills in Yorkshire are sometimes forced to sell their stock and go out of business because of these heavy capital losses. I do not believe we can expect those who graze sheep on Ashdown Forest to sustain a loss of stock to traffic that is bound to grow worse as a million more cars come on to the roads each year. My guess is that eventually, after months of public controversy, the Minister of Agriculture* may be requested to grant permission for the erection of wooden post-fencing along certain main roads in the forest. This has already been done alongside the A 31 through the New Forest; and these fences, incidentally, restrict access on to the heathland by encroaching cars. But it is vital that every mile of fencing should be marked by stiles and gates that give access to walkers and riders.

In their study of *Outdoor Recreation in the British Countryside* (1965), Professor G. P. Wibberley and Mr. T. L. Burton, of Wye College, Kent, have shown that agriculture in this locality may produce a surplus of about £7.8 per acre, while the net income derived from the use of the area for recreation, according to their complicated cost benefit analysis, may be almost as much. It is highly desirable on many counts that local farmers should continue to graze their sheep and cattle on the forest and to cut some bracken, and this would still be true even if the forest were to be declared a Country Park, primarily meeting the needs of outdoor recreation. Urban-minded economists who argue that agriculturalists should withdraw from marginal farmland needed for recreation forget that it is the farmer and his stock who maintain our countryside. Without them the green landscape of England would become a wilderness of scrub.

The area may well offer scope for the integration of forestry with farming and

*The Minister of Housing and Local Government is now responsible for Commons.

recreation. It is important here to get our priorities right. Ashdown Forest is the finest stretch of open heathland in South-East England, and if extensive areas were drained and planted with conifers, irreparable harm would have been done to a precious portion of our national heritage. Yet a modest increase in the extent of broad-leaved woodland on the forest would bring about some improvement of the soil, enrich the variety of the wild plant and animals, add to the natural beauty, and financially benefit the Lord of the Manor. A limited extension of the pine woodland would also prove profitable to the owner of the soil and add to the variety and interest of the area. In some instances, ground originally planted with Scots pines might eventually give way, under normal management techniques, to a natural diversity of structure and species with the object of maintaining sustained yield.

The Sussex Trust, in the Streeter Report of 1961, advocated the planting of about 125 acres between Kidbrooke Park and Hindleap Warren and between Hindleap Warren and the road from Forest Row to the Goat's Farm crossroads. The Report also welcomed the possibility of more shelterbelts of Scots pines, provided these did not have the effect of dividing broad stretches of open heath.

Some carefully planned landscape planting is needed around the lay-bys and car parks, and there is much to be said for appointing an experienced landscape architect as consultant. As I have written elsewhere, the Army managed to hide its tanks when preparing for the invasion of Europe in the last war. Is it impossible for us to hide the motor-car?

It should not be forgotten, however, that as the fire-breaks, and more responsible attitudes on the part of the public, reduce the number of heath fires, more scrub woodland may develop on the forest through natural regeneration. Already there is some mixed oak-birch scrub of several years standing in a number of areas, and we must expect the forest to be rather more wooded by the end of the century than for many years. Exploring the forest between Duddleswell and Nutley, one constantly comes upon the stumps and roots of old oaks, beech and silver birch, proof that mature trees grew on these open sectors not so many years ago.

More well-sited car parks will be needed to absorb the growing numbers of vehicles. Much interest would be aroused by an experimental nature trail, designed to open urban eyes to the intricate ecology of heathland, though efforts of this kind demand considerable preparation and wardening if they are to be effective. One local naturalist has already experimented with a mounted hide for watching wild deer, badgers and foxes, and the idea has considerable potentialities. If and when adequate funds are available to promote the enjoyment of visitors to the countryside, can we hope for the opening of a field museum and information centre in some well-wooded vale of the forest?

Dr. E. F. Edson, head of Fison's Research Department, has stressed that in the urbanised world of tomorrow, the school farm may play a particularly important part in bringing home to pupils the biological nature of man. Is it too far fetched to imagine a situation where an educational farm and field study centre for schools is established in the vicinity of the forest, the shepherding of a flock of sheep and the management of a small herd of cattle being largely undertaken by pupils housed on a local farm enjoying common rights on the forest?

Certainly, we must expect many more schools, as I have already hinted, to use the forest for biological purposes; and besides their field studies, some school parties might be employed on voluntary conservation work under the guidance of the Sussex Naturalists' Trust, and with the permission of the Conservators and the Lord of the Manor. Scrub clearance in the valleys, bracken control experiments, and the digging of small bog pools like those that old Martha Langridge knew so well are the sort of tasks waiting to be done. Once a boy has laboured on the forest with the aim of helping its wild plants and birds, he is not likely to set the heath on fire or to commit other acts of hooliganism. A Code of Practice for the Educational Use of the Countryside has now been prepared by the Field Studies Council and other bodies, including the Nature Conservancy.

Perhaps young people could help, too, in carrying out research into the biological capacity of the forest to sustain the increasing pressures of the future. We know far too little about how the heathland maintains itself, and how best the biological capital of the forest can be increased. People are most likely to appreciate the countryside and to *care* for it when they become actively involved in conserving it. "The Forest is still in every one's mouth—'on the forest', 'by the Forest', 'in' it, or 'over' it, or 'through it'," wrote a former resident of Crowborough, Richard Jefferies, seventy odd years ago.

That is just as true today; and it is equally true, as he pointed out, that wherever you go in Ashdown Forest, there is always a view. It may be a deep coombe, a distant wood, a ridge crowned with a clump of Scots pines, or a far-off red-tiled farmstead surrounded by the fields and woods of the Weald, pushed close together by distance; and above are the clouds—and since the light is so strong the forest forms a splendid observatory for the study of them. "Every day has its different clouds", he wrote, after watching some that were no wider than a pasture field sweep in from the Downs.

Soil and sky, plants, animals, man, these are the elements, we have written, that form Ashdown Forest. And it will remain a place of beauty, constantly delighting the eye and the ear—if only enough people *care*, if we face the future with our eyes open, and plan now the shaping of tomorrow.

APPENDIX

CHAIRMEN, CLERKS AND RANGERS OF THE BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

CHAIRMEN

1887	H. R. Freshfield
1893	A. Turner
1900	G. M. Maryon-Wilson
1930	H. R. Hardy
1936	J. R. Owen
1946	S. J. Marsh
1958	R. F. J. Brooke
1963	J. H. Drew
1967	Sir William Garrett

CLERKS

1887	W. A. Raper
1930	R. W. Fovargue
1951	P. A. Williams

RANGERS

1887 to 1907	One ranger
1907 to 1937	Two Rangers
1937 to 1942	Head Ranger and two Rangers

1942 to 1963	Two Rangers
1963 to date	Head Ranger and two Rangers
1887	J. W. Robinson
1888	J. McQuillan
1889	J. Taylor
1891	W. Faulkener
1891	S. Soper
1904	A. J. Pilbeam
1907 to 1912	W. Manners
1907 to 1926	W. Brown
1912 to 1942	H. Kirby
1926 to 1938	J. W. Hatchett
1938 to 1963	G. Day

SENIOR RANGERS

1938	H. Nicholas
1942	H. Kirby
1948	G. Day
1963	F. Stockley
1966	L. Arnold

THE SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS OF ASHDOWN FOREST

THE open spaces and public rights of way which we enjoy today are part of our national heritage. We can contribute to the enjoyment of others by heeding the following maxims:

PLEASE

DO

Put your litter in the bins provided or take it home.

Observe any instructions given by the Forest Rangers.

Keep your dog under control.

Use the open spaces set aside for the convenience of motorists.

Leave the wild flowers for others to enjoy.

DON'T

Light fires or stoves or drop lighted matches, cigarettes or pipe dottle.

Bring tents or caravans on to the forest.

Disturb wild life.

Play radios or gramophones to the annoyance of other people.

Park your car more than 15 yards from the highway.

Copies of the Bye-Laws relating to Ashdown Forest are posted on boards at various places on the Forest. Certain areas adjacent to the villages bordering on the Forest are set aside as playing fields for the local inhabitants, and visitors are requested to avoid parking their cars on or near these playing fields. The public may ride over Ashdown Forest, but must apply for a permit to the Clerk to the Conservators, 1 & 2 Judges' Terrace, East Grinstead, Sussex. The Public are requested not to interfere with the playing of golf on the Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Course near Forest Row.

We welcome new members and if you enjoy the Forest and would like to join us please write to the Hon. Secretary.

DEREK EVATT, M.B.E., T.D.,

The Square

Forest Row

Sussex

Tel. No. 2255

Others may wish to support our work by making a donation which will be gratefully received.

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